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Mary A. Page
from
Mary H. Tunney son Folkner

To a dear old friend on
her birthday, with the love
of the author of the book.

June 11th 1898.



FRIEND PERDITUS



FRIEND PERDITUS

A Novel

BY

MARY H. TENNYSON

In Two Volumes

VOL. I.

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FRIEND PERDITUS.

CHAPTER I.

To be born once happens to everyone; but to come into the world a second time and to retain a distinct and vivid remembrance of the sensations of entering life must surely be accounted a singular experience. My story is, to say the least, an unusual one, so unusual in fact that as yet I have never heard its exact parallel.

To me the physiological conditions of my case are very difficult of comprehension; may be those more scientifically learned than I am will understand the causes and their curious effect better than I do myself,

James Ray 15 Dec 56 Montlake: 2

but out of the strange circumstances of my second birth I have evolved a theory, which theory is, that infants and very young children are by no means the mindless, senseless beings they are usually accredited.

Not very long ago I met a man who stated as a fact that he recollected perfectly well making reasonable resolves in his mind before his infant tongue obtained the power of expression, and that on one occasion, seeing his nurse devouring a delicacy that had been sent up to him from the dessert table, he had, while suffering dumbly the tortures of Tantalus, firmly determined that so soon as he could articulate he would inform his mother of this cruel robbery of his rights.

I cannot vouch for the authenticity of this instance of the mental powers being developed earlier than the physical, but my own peculiar experiences have caused me to think much on this subject, and I will no longer accept the trite explanation of a pin or a pang of hunger as a cause for that

quick change from dreamy thoughtful gravity to annoyance and petulant anger so often seen in the faces of very young children.

I am firmly of the opinion that memory is the most delicate and the latest developed of our mental machinery, and that if it were not so many tales of infant mortification would be extant. So strongly am I impressed with this feeling that I should be careful to keep my conversation as pure before a wide open-eyed baby as I should before a young girl fresh from a convent school, and though I have been the subject of much laughter and some good-natured derision among my acquaintances for this particular fad, nothing will shake my conviction, and if I am in the right, is it a subject that we can afford to make light of?

It is a matter of opinion after all. Who dare state as a fact that these apparently blank minds are not receptive, and if so, who can calculate the bad balance that

might not be given to the mental structure even at this early stage?

My theory is that every brutal word and action heard or seen by the youngest child leaves an indelible impression or stain on the originally fair page, and that this is the only way of accounting for the saddening and prodigious instances of almost infant wickedness that one hears of only too often. When a wretched mother takes her speechless child to the gin palace, and smiles to see the air of wisdom with which it regards the debasing scene and listens to words one shudders at even in one's strength and vigour, who can doubt whither the life of the child will tend?

All this, I frankly admit, is not strictly pertinent to my story, but like all other men with a crotchet I should be glad to obtain as many converts to my opinion as possible. Therefore I say again—

Be as careful what you say or do before your babies as you are before your elder children, or you may bitterly repent it in

the future. I claim the right before any other living man to dictate on this subject, for I have been, as I have said, re-born, and I know that I could understand some time before I could make myself understood.

How often have we heard a proud young mother say, "Baby is getting on wonderfully; he can't speak at all yet, but he knows every word that is said to him; and he takes such notice of everything, too!"

Can you have a stronger argument in support of my theory?

Very well then. Young mothers, respect as well as love your babies. Don't quarrel with your husbands, or be fretful, or peevish, or unreasonable before them any more than you would before little Alice, who is six, or young Georgie, who is nearly nine. The other day I heard a lisping girl of two use a big big D. My hair fairly stood on end, and I must admit that the mother's manner of accounting for the unpleasant occurrence has considerably lowered the child's father in my estimation.

I do not believe, however, that under any conditions of precocity, a child could retain as vivid a recollection of his original infancy as I do of my second; for this reason I presume. My physical powers were matured at the time, and naturally my mental state was comparatively vigorous.

* * * * *

At half-past four on the morning of the sixth of August, 1880—I can fix the date and the hour now, though I was ignorant of them at the time—I re-awoke to life. I simply opened my eyes, and gazed upon the world for the first time, for all I knew to the contrary.

If I had had any power of drawing comparisons, or even of recognising the fact that I was making a re-entry into existence, my first impression would have been that the world was a small, ugly, uninteresting place; but such a mental effort as that would have been completely beyond my powers.

My eyes, however, were capable of reflecting to my intelligence the objects that

surrounded me, and I imagine that there must be some phonographic qualities about the brain of man ; for although at the time I had the vaguest, dimmest, comprehension of what occurred, afterwards I could remember every word that was said on the occasion.

I have tested the truthfulness of my impressions by repeating my recollections to the two persons who were present at the time, and they declare that down to the minutest detail my remembrance is identical with what happened.

My very first view of life was such a rosy brilliant one, that involuntarily I shut my weak eyes again, dazzled and blinded by the glory of the newly-risen sun, shining in through an open window, which, with the curtain drawn aside, stood almost at the foot of my bed ; but half-an-hour afterwards, I imagine, I mechanically reopened them, and this time, the light being more diffused, I was able to bear it.

I was lying, with my head very slightly raised, on a narrow, hard bed, my arms

being bound tightly to my sides by a coloured counterpane, which was securely fastened underneath the bed.

For the first few moments I lay quite still, gazing vacantly in front of me, and seeing nothing but the glitter of the sunshine and the straight white curtains which hung at the sides of the window ; but presently I became dimly conscious of a sense of uneasiness and discomfort ; to say that I suffered pain would represent far too active a condition of intelligence ; I was uncomfortable, and therefore I instinctively attempted to move ; but from what my discomfort arose I had not the very faintest perception.

Once, twice, I repeated my feeble efforts to free myself from the bonds that held me, and then an involuntary, inarticulate cry of thwarted weakness broke from me.

In an instant the room seemed to be full of bustle and sound, and almost immediately a figure clad in white interposed between my eyes and the light, and bending over

me addressed some observation to me in low awe-struck tones. What this question was I don't recollect, but I know that I looked into the woman's face fixedly and earnestly, and that after a minute she turned away, catching at a shawl that hung at the foot of the bed, and muttering—

“I had best call him, I suppose; he said I was to do so if there was any change.”

These words meant nothing to me at the time, nor did the shutting and subsequent re-opening of the door. I was left alone for only a couple of minutes, and then the woman returned, accompanied by a young man in his shirt and trousers only, with a rough head, and bare feet thrust into slippers. This young man strode quickly to my side and bent over me, apparently in the strongest excitement.

“Well, old fellow,” he said, controlling his agitation, and forcing himself to speak quietly and soothingly, “And how are you? Better this morning?”

I can recollect distinctly how eagerly

and breathlessly he awaited my answer, and how the excited hopeful eyes clouded over with disappointment under the weight of my impassive silence. He tried me with several other questions, and then, baffled and puzzled, he drew himself upright, and said to the woman—

“I can’t make it out, nurse. His eyes are clear and reasonable; the pupils dilate and contract naturally, and the skin is cool and moist, and yet he doesn’t seem to understand a word, or rather, I should say, he appears to understand and refuses to answer. Can he be dumb, do you think?”

“Lor’ bless your heart, no, sir; he aint dumb. Why, you must recollect it’s not ten days ago since he was raving in delirium; he talked fast enough then. Besides, he made a noise just now. It wasn’t a word; it was as much like a baby who has got a pin running into it as anything I have ever heard, only it was deeper.”

“Uncomfortable, eh?” said the young man, glancing rapidly over the arrange-

ments of my bed. "Hullo! what's the meaning of this?"

"That, sir?" was the rather tremulous answer. "Oh, I tied the counterpane that way to keep his arms in the bed; he did toss them about to that extent. It was awful to see him in the night."

"Ah, he disturbed your sleep, I expect. Now, understand this, nurse, I won't have any of these dodges for keeping patients quiet, unless I give the orders. No wonder the fever was difficult to subdue. There, my friend," he continued, laying the bed clothes gently round me; "you can take a deep breath now, and fling out at me, if you've got the strength in your poor old arms."

He raised my hand and then released it. Immediately it fell with a thump upon the bed.

"Ah," he cried excitedly, "the fever has gone, and the power with it. Exactly as I thought. Now, nurse, you and I mustn't have a difference just at this time.

We've pulled him through so far ; he shall not slip through our fingers now. Feed him up, nurse—feed him up. Let us show those black-coated old fellows we know something after all. I'll run down to the beach now and have a swim, I couldn't go back to bed to save my life ; and you give him some beef tea and brandy and then let him sleep."

" Good bye, old chap," patting me gently on the shoulder ; " if I don't make something of you before I've done with you, I'll throw physic to the dogs and go to sea."

The door shut again, and there was quiet in the room.

For a few minutes my hazy dreams continued, and then I was unceremoniously raised in the bed, the spout of some china vessel was inserted between my teeth, and my nose being violently pinched, I was compelled to swallow to escape suffocation.

After that I fell into a deep sleep, which I am told lasted for two days, and so pro-

found was it that though I mechanically swallowed when the china spout was put into my mouth, which happened every two hours, I did so perfectly unconsciously.

That this deep sleep was the saving of me I fully believe, for when I opened my eyes once more, I found that I could raise my hand and draw my foot up in the bed ; but still I was incapable of either thought or speech.

For some days I continued in this condition, eating and drinking voraciously, in fact my memory tells me that hunger and thirst were the all-pervading sensations of my life at this time, and then I arrived at the stage of taking notice.

I noticed the flies crawling and buzzing on the window panes, and I noticed a sparrow that hopped upon the sill ; what they were I had not the faintest idea, but they amused and interested me, as did also my hands which lay outside the counterpane, and I can recollect most distinctly the childish delight it afforded me when

I found that through an effort of my own will I could close and uncloze my fingers, and gather up handfuls of my bed-clothes.

There was, however, this difference between my intelligence and that of an ordinary baby. Like all infants, at first I had no power of calculating distances, but having stretched out my eager fingers once to clutch the bird upon the window sill, I never attempted it again—I recognised at once that it was beyond my reach. In fact my mental development would have been phenomenally rapid had I been indeed of tender years—I never required to be shown a thing twice, and at the end of a fortnight from the time of my recovery of consciousness, I was able to sit up in bed propped with pillows, and, having been instructed in the art, I could feed myself.

But still my intelligence was of the narrowest possible description: I could understand what was said to me in the way of orders, and act upon them in any simple

matter, but as yet my brain was quite inactive, nor did my heart stir with any emotion.

Another fortnight passed—my physical condition was now nearly normal—I could rise from my bed, could walk about my room, and watch from the open window the white sails of the great ships which floated upon the blue sea, distant half a mile across golden fields full of waving, bending corn, ripe for harvest.

Sitting facing the soft sea breezes, with each breath I drew in fresh health and strength, and with increasing vigour new sensations began to creep over me.

I became consious of a dreamy wonder as to who I was; and the wonder grew and grew until I became almost bewildered with it; and yet there was a fascination about the subject—who was I? where was I? I would return to it again and again.

Many times during the day the young doctor—Dr. Hall, the nurse called him—would come and sit by me, and talk kindly and patiently to me, as if I were indeed the

child I seemed to be. Wistfully, anxiously, he gazed at me, but never an answer did he get from me.

At first I regarded his visits with profound indifference; so long as I had my food and drink regularly I was perfectly satisfied; but as my darkened mind gradually became illumined, so did my heart revive and come to life again, and soon I began to listen eagerly for his footsteps, and when he left me, with some encouraging, hopeful words, I would utter one of my inarticulate sounds of disappointment and grief.

Matters went on like this for some little time longer; each day I gained strength of mind and body, until there was very little said before me that I could not understand the meaning of; but still my tongue seemed tied. I tried to speak, but I could not form a word; and when I saw how this incapability on my part distressed Dr. Hall, whom I had come to regard with a warm affection, tears of mortification would run down my cheeks.

“There, there old man,” he said soothingly one morning when my distress was keener than usual, “don’t get into a fluster, it can’t be helped; but I would give ten years of my life if I could unseal that tongue of yours; and I can’t see why on earth you shouldn’t talk. There is nothing unnatural about your brain, so far as I can make out. If you could speak, you know, we should learn all sorts of things we are ignorant of now. Bless my heart what a fool I am!” he cried, jumping up with a sudden thought, “I have never tried you with a pencil and paper yet; if there’s anything wrong with your tongue you can write, I dare say.”

In strong excitement he ran out of the room, returning at once with a slate and pencil which he put into my awkward fingers. I gazed from them to him enquiringly.

“Write, my dear fellow,” he said encouragingly. “Write down your name.”

I shook my head ; I did not comprehend him——

“See here,” he continued, “I’ll write mine—Charles Hall ; now you put yours under it.”

He returned the slate to me, but I could make no use of it, and I placed it on the table with a groan.

Dr. Hall rubbed his hand over his cropped head of stiff thick hair.

“Baffled again,” he muttered. “Upon my soul I don’t know what to do with the fellow. Those infernal lunacy commissioners will be here this afternoon ; I don’t see how I am to keep the poor chap if he doesn’t make a start soon. It’s useless my arguing that he’s reasonable, unless I can get more out of him than this. Well, good-bye old man, I shall be back to see you again presently, and two gentlemen with me ; confound them. Oh, my dear fellow, if you could come out with any thing, no matter what it is, the worst language in the world would be

better than none. I shall feel inclined to do something violent the day I see you taken off to one of their charming private establishments; but I am beginning to despair. Naturally they want to get hold of you, your forty thousand pounds will procure you plenty of attention, unfortunately."

I could not understand him, but I saw that he was much dejected, and I gathered that it was on my account, and because I could not speak; therefore when he had left me alone I made desperate efforts to articulate, but in vain. I could make uproar enough, even now the noise of my pitiful attempts ring in my ears; but I was sensible enough even then to recognise that my efforts were all sound and fury, signifying nothing.

So depressed and exhausted was I after this that when Dr. Hall came back, a few hours later, accompanied by two elderly gentlemen dressed in black with scrupulous neatness, I took little notice of their

entry, but sat with my head leaning on my hand, a picture of melancholy impassiveness.

These two gentlemen had paid me a visit during the early stage of my convalescence, but I had taken no heed of them on the occasion, nor this time when they approached me and enquired, with little show of interest, how I was, did I make any effort to rouse myself.

As a mere form, I imagine, they persisted in their questions for a few minutes, and then, shrugging their shoulders, they walked away with Dr. Hall to the other end of the room and the three of them commenced an animated conversation in subdued tones.

Turning my head, I could see that Dr. Hall's face was very flushed, and that he was talking with great earnestness, but not one word of the conversation could I distinguish until the taller of the two gentlemen in black raising his voice angrily, cried :

“ It is no good, my dear sir, your opinion

has been deferred to long enough, the man is as much a case for a mad-house as any one I have ever seen."

"Oh, pray sir, for God's sake don't talk so loud ; the poor fellow understands every word you say."

That was true to a certain extent only. I gathered they desired to take me somewhere, and I was unwilling to go, as I saw it was opposed to the wishes of the only creature I cared for in the world, but the word "mad-house" had no particular or horrible significance for me.

"Nonsense, Dr. Hall," the elder man replied angrily, "the fellow is an idiot, plainly enough. You admit yourself there is no symptom of paralysis, then why can't he speak or make himself understood in any way? Simply because the brain is hopelessly injured. I shall consider it my duty, as also will my colleague here, to advise the committee of the hospital to send him to a suitable place of retirement at

once. As for you, my dear sir, I should advise you not to oppose yourself to us ; I don't want to put a spoke into any young man's wheel ; but you are so clearly interested in keeping this man under your thumb, that your opinion will be looked upon with some suspicion I'm afraid. Forty thousand pounds in the hands of a brainless man might be turned to pretty good account by any one gaining a complete influence over the unfortunate soul."

The young doctor's eyes flashed with sudden fury, as he walked to the door without a word, and opened it for the others to pass out. But when they had gone he fell into a chair which stood beside me, and dropping his face upon his hands, groaned out :

"They have beaten me ! God help him, poor creature, he is doomed now ! "

My heart seemed to be stirred, and a warm gush of tenderness glowed within me.

Leaning forward, I placed my hands

on his and drew them down from his face. He looked mournfully into mine, which I could feel was working with unusual excitement.

“ Ah, lad ! ” he cried ; “ if you could but speak, even one word ; it is your obstinate silence that will ruin you. But one word, Yes or No ; how simple it seems. Oh, try—try—surely you can do it. Yes—yes—yes.”

Suddenly something seemed to flash across me. I watched his lips narrowly, and then I made a vigorous effort.

“ Ye—yes—yes ! ”

Slowly and falteringly the word came ; but intelligibly at least.

With a cry of joy Dr. Hall sprang to his feet, and grasped my hands in his.

“ Good, good ! ” he shouted. “ Now, again ; quick, speak again.”

But I could not. I simply had the power of imitating him at present.

“ Say Yes again,” he cried.

“ Yes,” I repeated, this time with no hesitation.

“Now, No.”

“No!” I shouted triumphantly.

“Now, Diamond.”

“Diamond!”

And so on for a dozen words or more.

His clever grey eyes were actually moist with excitement and pleasure.

“Eureka!” he cried. “I have solved the mystery; you have forgotten the art of speaking, that is all. Hurrah! hurrah! I have a thorough Englishman’s objection to being beaten. Now, I shall go and have it out with those two old fogies downstairs. They do not take you away yet, my fine fellow. Good-bye for the present. I shall come back in an hour and teach you how to attain an easy and agreeable manner of conversing, as the text books have it. Good-bye.”

He looked anxiously at me, I read his meaning immediately, and proudly and confidently I raised my head.

“Good-bye,” I said.

“Bless my soul!” he answered with a

break in his deep voice, running out of the room, "that's the pleasantest music that has ever fallen upon my ears."

As for me, I was perfectly happy. I had done well. I had been praised by the one I loved, and like a child I was satisfied with the present.

CHAPTER II.

My progress, dating from the afternoon on which my tongue was loosened and, as it were, set free, was equally rapid and sure. Charles Hall was with me continually; indeed I fear his other patients at the little hospital where I had found a refuge suffered somewhat from want of attention at this time.

I was as eager to learn as he was to teach, and the result of our combined efforts was, that at the end of a week the power of speech had returned to me almost entirely.

My physical strength, too, seemed now to be firmly re-established, and each day my good friend would take me for long walks,

which were full of delightful interest to me.

Everything I saw seemed new and strange and wonderful, and I was never tired of asking questions, nor he of answering them.

Only for a short time, however, did my condition of blissful content in the present continue; as my mind grew more vigorous, a shadow seemed to fall upon me, and all sorts of confusing doubts and fears crowded into my awakening brain. I began to lose my appetite and my spirits, and during our walks I would fall into long dreamy reveries from which Charles Hall would rouse me by putting his arm affectionately through mine, with some such remark as—

“Pleasant thoughts, old fellow, eh?”

Then I would leave my weary groping in the dark for the moment, and shaking off the oppression that was creeping over me I would resume our interrupted conversation with one of my ordinary questions.

But I soon began to perceive, to my

dismay, that when I did this the kindly interest which had lighted up my friend's rugged, manly face, would fade away into an expression of cold blank disappointment, and at last the time arrived when he dropped my arm suddenly, and, leaving my question unanswered, walked rapidly away from me across the lonely sea beach.

I knew at once that I had offended him, and my heart ached at the knowledge; breaking into a run I caught him up at once.

“What have I said?” I inquired anxiously. “You are angry?”

He looked sternly at me for a moment, and then his grey eyes softened and a slight suspicion of moisture appeared in them. He was ashamed of the weakness evidently, for his bronzed cheek flushed and he turned his face away as he replied in constrained tones—

“I am disappointed, that's all. I am a fool to feel it; but I will own to being disappointed.”

“In what way?” I asked. “I suppose I have disappointed you. I am sorry for it.”

We walked on in silence for a minute or two, and then Charles Hall stopped abruptly and faced me.

“There must be an end of this,” he said somewhat roughly. “I am not in the habit of beating about the bush, therefore I will come to the point at once.”

“Do so,” I said, looking at him drearily, and kicking the shingle about with my foot.

I was, in truth, very unhappy; my doubts and perplexities had been crowding upon me more thickly than ever all that day, and now, in addition to my other anxieties, it seemed I had offended my only friend.

“Look here,” he said. “I don’t wish to force myself upon you if you don’t want my friendship. What I have done for you has been merely a professional duty. You are well now. Our relations of doctor and patient no longer exist, and if you desire it our acquaintance can end here.”

I stared at him in speechless dismay.

“What I mean is this,” he continued, looking away from me and grinding his stick savagely down into the loose stones of the beach, “there can be no friendship where there is no confidence. Now I have purposely abstained from asking you any questions as to your name and past life hitherto, because I felt that I should be taking a mean advantage of your weakness by doing so. I waited for your recovery, hoping that you might tell me voluntarily something of yourself; but now I can see plainly that you wish to remain an enigma to the end. And so, of course, it must be.”

A faint, sickly sensation came upon me; all my obscure doubts seemed to be assuming a tangible form. A curious trembling seized me, and tottering to a great boulder of stone I sat down upon it, and then, dreading his answer, with an effort I said:

“I would not lose your friendship. I

love you, and am grateful to you. What is it you wish to know?"

Turning his eyes on me, with a cry he ran to me.

"For heaven's sake, man, don't look so. Indeed I never meant to upset you like this. Don't tell me anything if it is so difficult."

"Yes, yes," I murmured, "I wish to, if I can; but what is it? What is it?"

"Well, in the first place, then—though pray understand, my dear fellow, that I wouldn't for the world have you tell me anything that you wish to conceal—what is your name?"

In his sudden anxiety for me he had fallen on one knee by my side; despairingly I clutched his two shoulders with my hands, and with a desolate cry said:

"God help me; I do not know. Oh, my friend, pity me; I cannot tell you."

With a great start he sprang to his feet, and I rose too.

"What do you mean?" he cried breathlessly.

“I mean,” I said hopelessly, “that I know nothing—neither who I am, or where I came from. I am ignorant of everything except what you have taught me. For all I know to the contrary my life commenced that morning when, for the first time, I saw you bending over me in my bed.”

Hall's face grew as pale as mine, and his eyes dilated with horrified amazement.

“You are telling me the truth?” he murmured brokenly.

I re-seated myself upon the stone boulder, and covered my face with my hands.

“Aye, the truth,” I echoed mournfully. “That baby that we saw in the lodge-keeper's arms could as well answer your questions as I can. I know no more where I came from than he does.”

“But, my dear fellow,” Charles Hall resumed, pulling himself together, “don't you recollect the shipwreck and the storm? Come, try, try.”

“No,” I answered hopelessly; “I recol-

lect nothing before I opened my eyes in my little room at the hospital."

"But your diamonds; come now, surely your diamonds must recall something to you. You raved of them continually in your delirium."

"Diamonds?" I replied interrogatively. "What are diamonds? I remember that that was one of the first words you taught me, but nothing further."

"By Jove! that's a clincher!" he ejaculated in the utmost dismay. "Why, my dear boy, you have diamonds in your possession worth forty thousand pounds."

"I have something valuable in my possession?" I cried in eager astonishment, a ray of hope piercing the darkness in which I groped. "But, my dear friend, if you know that, you must know more about me than I do myself. For pity's sake tell me everything, it may help me, for I declare to you most solemnly my mind is a perfect blank beyond the morning I awoke in that little room yonder."

“Why did you not tell me this before?” he asked sympathetically. “Surely you must have been aware of your peculiar condition for some little time past.”

“Only dimly,” I replied sadly. “I knew that there was something wanting in me, but not exactly what it was. I suppose I had a child’s faith that it would come right of itself. It is only within the last few days that my extraordinary position has begun to weigh upon me heavily.”

“And I was blaming you for your reticence,” he said remorsefully. “My dear friend, forgive me; I ask your pardon from my heart.”

I grasped his proffered hand, and with the touch of the strong resolute fingers the dreary sense of loneliness that had come upon me was lifted, and my spirits grew lighter and more confident.

“I cannot doubt your friendship, Hall,” I said; “you have proved it again and again. Though I am so profoundly ignorant—you would scarcely believe how ignorant—I have

had for some little time the power of observation, and I have seen for myself how great your patience and devotion have been. Now my most unfortunate and extraordinary condition is one of the mysteries you must help me to solve.”

He stood lost in reflection for a minute or so, and then shaking his head, he said :

“ I can’t see to the bottom of your case at this moment, I frankly admit. I have never met with a similar ; you are perfectly reasonable now, nobody could doubt it. I have heard, however, of cases of suspended memory, which have suddenly righted themselves. Come, let us walk towards home ; I’ll tell you what I know on the way. I should not be in the least surprised if I struck the key note of your recollections at once.”

Oh how confidently and hopefully I began to listen. I firmly believed with him that of a sudden the black curtain which covered my past would rise ; but it did not.

Earnestly and vividly he told his story, glancing at me continually, and anxiously

awaiting the moment when my memory should revive.

At last he stopped. My spirits had been gradually sinking.

“And what then?” I asked after a moment’s pause.

“That is all I know,” he replied; “the rest you remember better than I do. Have I not thrown any light upon your darkness?”

“Not any,” I answered hopelessly. “You tell me that I was found floating twenty miles out at sea, bound to a plank of wood. That I was picked up by fishermen, brought ashore, and then carried to your little hospital. That I was unclothed with the exception of a flannel shirt and trousers, and a heavy leathern belt; that I was perfectly unconscious, and that I had an awful wound in the top of my head. All this recalls absolutely nothing to me. But is there not something else? How about this valuable possession of mine?”

Hall struck his forehead impatiently with his hand.

“Of course,” he said, “that is the most important detail—the diamonds evidently occupied your last conscious thoughts. How could I have forgotten them, even for a moment? Now, my boy, steady yourself—don’t get excited and nervous—it will all come right I tell you. When we unclasped the heavy leathern belt from your waist we found an oilskin bag sown into it. This bag I opened the day following your rescue, in the presence of the hospital committee who meet here once a month. It contained another bag of wash-leather, and inside the wash-leather was some carefully folded wadding. When the wadding was pulled apart, I think you might have heard our combined shout of surprise at the other end of the field. We found five enormous diamonds, and about thirty smaller ones.”

Somewhat impatiently I interrupted him. I was bitterly disappointed, and my disappointment made me testy.

“I have told you before,” I said, “that I do not know what diamonds are.”

With a sympathetic shake of the head he continued—

“I am afraid we are not any further out of our muddle yet. Diamonds are precious stones—bright, glittering things. See, this is a very inferior one in my ring here.”

I examined it earnestly; but the sparkle of the gem seemed to mock me, and I pushed his hand gloomily aside, saying, with some contempt—

“And do you mean to tell me that my valuable possession is like that?”

“Like that, with a difference,” he replied. “This stone of mine is worth £20 perhaps. We had a man down from Liverpool to value yours. He said they represented £40,000 at the least. That rather frightened us, so we locked them up in the local bank, where they are now. We didn’t like to have them on the premises any longer than we could help. Come, dear old fellow, don’t look so dreary; you have plenty of money, at any rate, that’s something.”

“What’s the good of it to me?” I replied,

mournfully. "I don't know how to spend it?"

He broke into a little laugh, and hooked his arm in mine.

"Ah, never fear," he responded; "you will find plenty of teachers ready and willing to instruct you in that art. Come, cheer up, it is only for a time this obscurity will last, take my word for it; and now let us see how we can make the best of a very curious situation."

We had reached our destination by ~~this~~, and found our simple meal awaiting us in Hall's little private room. With a weary sigh I sank into one of the chairs.

Placing his hand under my sunken chin, Hall gently raised my face.

"It won't do, old fellow," he said; "we mustn't overdo it. No more worrying and puzzling this evening. You look fagged. Come now, eat a good supper, afterwards I will play you a tune or two, and then, if you please, you will pack off to bed and not attempt to think of anything. To-morrow

morning we will go for a sail. You don't know how much brighter one's prospects look on a sunny morning with a gentle breeze, and the sea dancing and rippling round you."

Utterly worn out from the unwonted excitement I had sustained, I fell asleep while he played, and I scarcely awoke even as I stumbled upstairs under Hall's guidance. I rather suspect that he mixed something soporific in my tea that evening, for I am usually a light sleeper.

The next morning Hall aroused me early, and together we wended our way rapidly to the sea shore. The sun was glorious and warm although we had reached the last week in October, and the air was so exhilarating and fresh that my heart grew lighter even in spite of myself. Actively I bustled about, pushing and helping to get the boat afloat; at length we glided off into deep water somewhat unexpectedly, and Hall only managing to scramble in by throwing himself across the gunwale and

elevating his legs in a comically awkward manner in doing so. I burst into a fit of hearty irrepressible laughter.

At the first moment he was a little nettled at my hilarity, for he was drenched to the skin, and besides had bumped and grazed himself; but in an instant his rugged face broke into the most beaming of smiles, and clapping me heartily on the shoulder he cried—

“Laugh away, my boy, make up for lost time; why I would have barked myself from head to foot willingly to have heard that laugh of yours, and considered it cheap at the price. Wasn't I right? isn't the morning air the best tonic in the world? Now then, just hold the tiller for a moment while I light my pipe. Keep your weather eye open, old man, and look out for squalls.”

I had been for a sail with him several times before, so that I was quite capable of being trusted. At length, however, having wrung the water from his clothes and hung

his coat and waistcoat up to dry, Hall relieved me of my charge, and then, pipe in mouth, commenced gravely and kindly.

“While you were sleeping last night, old fellow, I put on my considering cap and went over your case as carefully and earnestly as I could, and this is the conclusion I have come to. It’s evident to me that you have only partially recovered the shock to your system at present, but there is every reason to believe that your restoration will be made perfect before very long. Your wisest course, therefore, will be to wait patiently until that time arrives; we cannot hurry nature, and meanwhile you must endeavour to enjoy the present as much as you can.”

“But how can I? how can I?” I exclaimed. “I have no power of enjoying anything beyond mere physical sensations.”

“But, my dear fellow, a month or two’s reading will set you all right in that respect.”

“But, Hall, don’t you understand,” I cried, “I cannot read.”

He stared at me in astonishment.

“But I have often seen you with a book in your hand.”

“I know you have,” I replied, reddening with shame. “I used to hold it at first because I saw you do so, for no other reason; and latterly, when you gave it me as usual, I have felt unable to confess that I was incapable of understanding a word. Oh, my friend, realise my position if you can. I know absolutely nothing.”

For a minute or two Hall seemed quite crushed by the magnitude of my misfortune, and then giving himself a shake he passed his hand over his eyes and said earnestly—

“One thing is quite certain, you must set to work to regain your lost knowledge as soon as possible. I believe, from what I have seen, you will learn easily. You may be as ignorant as a child; but you must remember you will not work with the intelligence of a child; therefore, don’t lose heart whatever you do; and, above all, recollect this,” he continued earnestly, “you

must not tell to anyone what you have told to me. I don't want to frighten you, but if you are to keep your freedom your secret must be shared by no one else. Now, the first thing is to find a discreet teacher for you."

I looked wistfully at him, and then the desire of my heart broke forth in words :

"Will you not teach me?" I cried. "Oh, for mercy's sake don't turn me away from you. I could learn of you; with another the sense of my ignorance would crush me altogether. Have pity on me, and save me. I am rich, you say, take all I have in the world. I give it freely to you. Only let me stay with you, and help me to regain my lost senses?"

His eyes glistened with emotion, and his firm honest-looking mouth quivered a little; for a moment only he hesitated, and then grasping me by the hand he cried :

"I will help you, and God so deal with me as I with you."

I could not speak. I could only wring

his hand hard in my gratitude, and then he went on cheerily—

“See here, old man, the whole thing can be arranged easily. We will leave this place as soon as ever I can find a substitute at the hospital; that will be in a week’s time at the latest—it’s a comfortable little berth with nothing in the world to do, your case was quite a godsend in the way of practice;—and then we will be off to some quiet country town where we can go in for work for six months. After that we can make other plans. With regard to your money, my boy, fortunately nobody need accuse me of attaching myself to you with interested motives. I am studying medicine simply for the love of it. I am an orphan with three or four hundred a year of my own, so I don’t want any of your money. I will teach you right willingly for the sake of the interest I feel in you.”

I could not express the feelings which swelled within my heart; but I fancy

that he understood even then how boundless was the gratitude with which I was filled.

We were very silent for the rest of our trip, but when we reached home Hall said—

“There is just one more question which I am going to ask you, old fellow, and then I shall not worry you with another. When you look at yourself in the looking-glass doesn't your face recall any other scenes to you?”

“I don't think so,” I replied, “but I can't say I have regarded myself with any particular attentiveness.”

“Come and do so now then,” he said, walking to his dressing-table. “Here, wait a minute though,” he went on, “now I remember, you were much closer cropped about the beard when you arrived here. Sit down and I'll trim you up a bit.”

I placed myself under his hands, and after a few minutes of snipping with the scissors he declared himself quite satisfied, and desired me to look at myself.

Again I was disappointed, though I myself had hoped little from this experiment.

“It’s no use, Hall,” I said. “I am utterly lost. My face is entirely uninteresting to me.”

“By Jove, I wish mine were as uninteresting,” he replied with a laugh. “Bless my heart, my dear boy, you are splendid! Why, my phiz is plainer than ever by the side of yours. You will think me weak-minded, I dare say, but your good looks pleaded powerfully for you with me when you were first brought in here. I am ashamed to say I don’t think I should have been half so interested in your case if your face had been more ordinary. Like many other ugly people, I set an undue store on a handsome appearance.”

I smiled at him.

“I am no judge of any thing,” I said. “Your face is pleasant to me and I will not complain of mine again, since it has secured me such a friend as you are.”

CHAPTER III.

AFTER all, the getting away was not so simple a matter by any means, as Hall had predicted. In the first place the committee of the little country hospital were not at all inclined to accept my friend's hasty resignation. They were rather a rough, uneducated set of people; and, being unwilling to let me entirely out of their hands, they treated Hall's motives with open suspicion. This mean estimation of his character he spoke of with the contempt it deserved; but we were both considerably put out when the chairman of the committee declared he should not feel himself justified in permitting me to leave the institution until the

Government lunacy commissioners had declared that I was fit to be at large.

“It’s a terrible bore, old boy,” said Hall, returning to me with a very worried countenance; “it’s the very thing I wished to avoid for you. But, however, it can’t be helped; put a bold face upon it; above all don’t get funky, and trust to me to pull you through somehow. The commissioners can’t be here for three days, which is lucky, for you will have time to learn your lesson. Now, in the first place, we must christen you; it will never do to confess to being nameless, you know. Choose your cognomen, and I’ll stand godfather. Now, then, Christian name first.”

I shook my head.

“Choose for me,” I said.

Leaning his brow upon his hand, regarding me steadfastly, with wistful compassion shining in his clear grey eyes, he began to consider.

“Let me see, my friend,” he murmured.

His voice was rich and musical, and re-

flecting the pity in his mind, there was a more than usually tender inflection in it. No name could be so dear to me as that of his friend. Surely to one so forlorn as I no title could bring with it such comfort as that.

“Hall,” I said, somewhat huskily, “after all I will select for myself — call me Friend.”

“Friend !” he exclaimed. “Why, my dear fellow, what a singular choice. The word is never used in that way.”

“Does that matter ?” I asked.

“Well, no ; I don’t know that it does.”

“Then I would rather hear that name from you than any other. Every time you speak the word my heart warms within me.”

He wrung my hand.

“So be it then,” he said cheerily, “and if anyone asks you the reason for so peculiar and Quaker-like an appellation, you must say it is a family name—that will satisfy them. Now for the second.”

“Could I not have something descriptive of my condition?” I asked sadly. “I don’t mean exactly the word Lost, but something of the same sort.”

He screwed his mouth up comically.

“Well upon my soul,” he said; “you have some rather strange notions. Look here, old fellow, you mustn’t be offended some day in the far future if I don’t consult you in christening my son and heir. Friend Lost! a rather deadly lively sort of name, eh?”

“Lost will not do,” I replied; “I want something that you and I will understand, and not everyone else.”

“Well, what do you say to Perditus—that is the Latin for lost; but it sounds rather better; and you may depend upon it nobody will ever think of connecting the two words.”

“That will do very well,” I said; “for remember, Hall, please God with your help I shall not have to bear this name of my own choosing very long.”

“Very true, old fellow,” he answered, readily. “You shall be Friend Perditus for just as short a period as we can manage.”

The next three days were very anxious ones, for the tremendous difficulties we had to contend with can hardly be over estimated.

I felt a firm conviction within myself that if I were to be removed from Charles Hall’s protection and tutelage the shock of our severance would wreck my feeble brain entirely; and, although he tried to make light of my gloomy forebodings, I was shrewd enough to recognise plainly how agitated and distressed he grew as the time for the momentous interview approached.

We breakfasted at nine, and at eleven the commissioners were to arrive. But I could not eat, nor could Hall, and at last he threw down his knife with a groan.

“Come out into the garden,” he said, “and let us just run through the scene again for the last time. Have confidence in yourself, and you will come out all right.”

The Lord be thanked you have as sensible and clever a head on you as any one need wish to look at. Your head will count forty points out of a hundred, like a terrier's at a show."

All this was Greek to me, but I could see the reflection had brought him some comfort, so I cheered up also.

Up and down, up and down the narrow slip of garden we walked, rehearsing the scene which Hall had so carefully prepared. And then in the distance, on the dusty road, which lay like a broad white ribbon along the green sward topping the cliffs, the hired vehicle containing the terrible lunacy commissioners could be seen approaching.

"Courage," whispered Hall, laying his hand firmly on my arm; "keep cool, and I defy any one to detect the flaw in your armour. Stay, meet them outside, here; don't let us seem to run away from them."

I glanced at his face; he was as pale as death, and there were actually drops of sweat upon his brow. I knew that it was

for me he suffered, and my spirits rose, and my heart yearned within me with gratitude.

Impulsively I flung my arm round his shoulder.

“Hall,” I cried, “do not fear for me. You will see I will not forget one word you have taught me. Oh, my friend, I will die before they shall take me from you.”

We found that the fly contained the chairman of the hospital committee, as well as the two elderly gentlemen, whom I recognised at once. Acting on Hall’s advice, with a beating heart I left his side, and advanced to meet them alone.

What it cost me to voluntarily deprive myself of his support nobody could imagine, but I saw at once how valuable a suggestion it had been on his part.

The elder of the two commissioners was deaf ; all his asides were, therefore, much more audible than he imagined them to be ; and when he saw me coming towards them, and Hall keeping in the background, he said to his colleague in a loud whisper :

“This looks well, you know; he’s not afraid to speak for himself. I am surprised, I must admit.”

Much encouraged, I greeted them politely by name, and then waited for them to speak. Somewhat constrainedly they returned my salutations, and then walked straight past me into the hall, and through that into the room called the committee-room.

Following them closely, I ventured to glance at Hall. His eyes were bright and hopeful, and already the colour was returning to his cheeks. Strengthened and braced up I entered the committee-room, and found the three gentlemen already settled in their places behind the green baize-covered table, ready to sit in judgment on me. It was evident to me from their aspects that for some reason they wished to pronounce unfavourably on my case; perceiving this, a sense of attempted injustice and wrong was aroused within me, and instinctively my latent manhood rose in arms against the oppression they would put upon me.

“Well, sir,” the elder of the two commissioners commenced, in harsh, uncere-
monious tones, “and pray what account can
you give of yourself now?”

They had not asked me to be seated, but
coolly I took a chair opposite them, and
then, with apparently the most perfect self-
possession, though in reality my heart beat
loudly against my ribs, I leant my elbows
upon the table which separated us, and said
calmly.

“I don’t quite follow you, sir. Any
information which does not touch upon
private concerns of my own I will give
you most willingly; but at the same time
I must expostulate with you upon your
tone in questioning me.”

My manner evidently was a surprise to
the trio, but it did not conciliate them, and
the chairman broke in roughly—

“You may expostulate as much as you
like, but you will have to answer for all
that.”

I made no reply; part of Hall’s instruc-

tions had been, "Don't speak more than you can help."

"Now, then, please, what is your name?" the chairman continued rudely.

"Friend Perditus."

"What?" cried the commissioner, who was hard of hearing.

"Friend Perditus," I replied, raising my voice.

"What an extraordinary name! How do you spell it?"

Involuntarily I clenched my fists upon the table before me, and drew in my breath sharply. Careful though Hall had been, he had not prepared me for this. At the second question only my armour had proved valueless.

My feet grew cold and my head hot, and with a deadly sinking of the heart I looked at my friend, who had stationed himself in a distant corner of the room. His eyes were fixed upon the ground, and I could see that the corners of his firm mouth were trembling. Plainly he could give me no

help. I must rely upon myself alone in this emergency.

Silently I waited for an inspiration of some sort. In a moment, like a flash of light, it came to me.

“Well, sir,” the commissioner continued suspiciously. “Why do you not answer me. How do you spell your name?”

“The words are spelt as they are pronounced,” I replied.

“That is no answer at all,” the old man went on testily; “you must know that the same sounds are often spelt differently.”

I began to lose heart again, but the desperation of my circumstances nerved me, and I said indifferently,

“That’s true; well then, Friend is spelt in the ordinary way among the Quakers.”

I recollected Hall’s remark about the Quakers, though of the meaning of the term I was profoundly ignorant; “and as for Perditus, as you must surely know, that is a Latin word. There is not more than

one way of spelling that among educated people, I should imagine."

This was a wild random shot of mine ; but, to my joy, I perceived that it hit well home. The three gentlemen grew red and coughed nervously, for what reason I know not ; possibly they were not familiar with the word and were ashamed to confess their ignorance ; any way, to my relief, they did not press this point, merely remarking ill-temperedly—

"You have a very roundabout way of replying to questions, Mr. Perditus, please be more direct in future."

I bowed politely, and said in a propitiatory tone—

"I will certainly do my best, gentlemen ; and I must claim your kind indulgence if I appear irritable or wanting in courtesy ; I have sustained a great shock, as you know, and am still feeling the effects of it."

"It is in connection with that shock we would question you," the deaf commissioner

said in somewhat mollified tones. "How did it occur?"

"I was shipwrecked as you know," I replied, "and received a severe injury to the head."

"And pray what was the name of the ship and of the captain?"

Here again I could give no satisfactory answer; but Hall and I had arranged for this emergency.

Looking them firmly in the face I said quietly,

"That is a question, gentlemen, that is not convenient to me to answer. As you probably know, the storm which destroyed my vessel was fatal to two others also; the 'Shark,' the 'David Hudson,' and the 'Rose Marie,' all went down on that awful night, but which of the three I was aboard I decline to say."

"But what can be your reason?" the chairman inquired hotly.

"That is my secret," I replied firmly. "I am sorry to appear ungracious, however."

They looked grimly at me for a minute or two, and then the chairman muttered—

“This is a very suspicious matter, Mr. Perditus. There were valuable gems in your possession when you were rescued; by refusing all account of yourself you suggest the idea that those gems were not honestly come by.”

I had been waiting for this. Rising I pushed my chair under the table, and then leaning with both hands on the back of it, I said—

“Gentlemen, my circumstances compel me to endure your rudeness; but I cannot put up with much more of it. You have no right to suspect me of dishonesty simply because for a time I wish to conceal from you the exact means by which I reached England. My diamonds, as you are aware, are very valuable, so valuable, in fact, that had a jewel robbery to that extent taken place anywhere you would probably have heard of it.”

All this was Hall at second hand; it was

an effort of memory merely on my part ; but it answered its purpose. The chairman, who I could see was my principal opponent, began to lose confidence in himself, and became more conciliatory in his tone.

“ I don’t wish, of course, to make any direct insinuations against your character, Mr. Perditus, but you must admit yourself that your conduct while among us has not been calculated to inspire confidence. For instance, until this morning I have been unable to learn your name.”

“ I desired to remain unknown,” I murmured, “ but perceiving you made so serious a matter of it, I have sacrificed my own wishes to that extent.”

The strain was beginning to tell upon me, and I was in momentary fear of their putting me to some practical test, such as giving me a page of a book to read, when to my intense relief the deaf commissioner arose and said to the chairman with a weary yawn :

“ It seems to me, Mr. Black, that we are wasting our time here. We can’t give a

certificate of lunacy simply because a man declines to answer what he considers impertinent questions. Besides," he continued in an audible whisper, "the fellow's as shrewd as you or I. If we don't take care we shall get into trouble over this affair. You have your reasons probably, Black, for wishing to keep him and his property to a certain extent under your control, but we have no inducements of that kind, and it wouldn't be very agreeable to be charged with a conspiracy to shut up a sane man, eh?"

Mr. Black's face grew crimson with vexation, for he knew that I must have heard every word of this speech; but I was too well satisfied and relieved in my mind to feel a pleasure in his mortification.

"You need not fear that I shall make myself in any way disagreeable in this matter," I said. "Indeed I should be sorry to leave so ungracious an impression behind me. I owe a great deal to the institution that Mr. Black represents, and it would be very churlish of me to resent

in any spirit of ill temper a slight mistake on his part."

Pulling out my pocket book I opened it and took from it a slip of paper with which Hall had supplied me. Then holding out my hand I said to the astonished chairman—

"Let us part good friends, Mr. Black, and allow me to take this opportunity of offering this hospital through you a most inadequate acknowledgement of my debt. Here is a cheque for a hundred pounds, drawn as you will see in my friend Hall's name, and I should be glad to subscribe annually fifty guineas towards your most valuable institution."

Mr. Black was too completely astounded to make any intelligible reply to this address, but he grasped my offered hand mechanically and then after a polite bow to the other two gentlemen I walked slowly and carelessly out of the room.

I lingered for a moment on the threshold as if waiting for my friend to join

me, and then I heard the elder commissioner break out in wrath.

“A nice cock and bull story you have been getting up, Black. A pretty set of fools we shall look if those young fellows go and talk about this. And what the devil did you mean by imputing all sorts of sordid motives to Dr. Hall, too? A man who can draw cheques for a hundred pounds on such a bank as Coutts’ doesn’t usually care to soil his fingers with money grubbing.”

I closed the door softly, and thrusting my arm lovingly through my good friend’s I drew him out into the sunlight again. But no sooner did we reach the air than to my surprise he shook himself free of me, and the next moment I saw him disappearing at full speed round the corner of the house.

I watched the commissioners come out and drive away with Mr. Black, who hung his head in a most dejected fashion, and then Hall returned to me. His face was of

ashen paleness, and his straight lips were turned down at the corners in the most deplorable fashion.

“Why, my dear fellow,” I cried, “what is the matter with you? What has happened?”

“Nothing particular,” he murmured plaintively. “Come and give me a dose of brandy and soda, for goodness sake, my dear boy. Oh, Friend, I have been as sick as a dog. A small boat at sea, with a heavy swell on, is nothing to such a half hour as I’ve gone through. I’m turned over altogether; I feel absolutely green.”

“You look so,” I said with a laugh.

Oddly enough the interview had not affected me half so seriously as it had him, probably because I was comparatively ignorant of the horrible fate which would have been mine had the result been different.

I assisted Hall into his private room, and then I gave him the stimulant he had asked for. In a very few minutes he began to revive.

“ Ah,” he said, with a sigh of relief, “ I am getting more fit now.”

Then he covered his eyes with his big brown hands, and, without any warning, one or two great, hard, dry sobs, broke from him.

I rose in alarm, and went to his side.

“ All right, old fellow, all right,” he murmured brokenly, stretching out his hand for mine. “ Oh, what a fool I am ! A woman need be ashamed of such weakness as this ; but you won’t point the finger of scorn at me, I know.”

“ There,” jumping to his feet with a tiny drop glistening on his thick black lashes, and clapping me heartily on the back, “ Richard is himself again ! I am proud of you, my boy ; you did me credit ; it was the most infernal time I have ever passed ; but, I will admit, my bosom swelled with honest pride, even while I was enduring the tortures of the—well—condemned. All’s well that ends well, however. To-morrow we will start on the new life, and good luck attend us.”

“It will,” I cried; “I feel that it will! Oh, Hall, who can say that good luck has not already come to me? I know not what I have lost, but I do know what I have found through my trouble. Ah, my dear fellow, if the restoration of my old self were offered me at the price of our friendship, do you think that I would hesitate?”

“Don’t, my boy, don’t,” he murmured, turning his head away. “I am very ashamed of myself, but I can’t stand any more to-day. God bless you.”

CHAPTER IV.

THREE days later, Charles Hall and I packed up our belongings—mine being of a very modest nature, and consisting of clothes which one small trunk sufficed to contain—and bidding farewell to the little Lancashire seaside town, took train for the south.

All places being the same to me, Hall had decided upon the locality in which I should start my pursuit of knowledge, and Winchester being his birthplace, and, moreover, according to him, the most soul-inspiring, poetical, quaint city in the whole of England, to Winchester we took our way one frosty morning in early November.

My good friend had to bear all the expenses of my little outfit and of our journey, and indeed for six months after that I drew upon his purse for everything.

Fortunately for me his year's sojourn at the little hospital had enabled him to save the whole of his private income for that time, and, therefore, he had the means to supply me with the cheque which had argued so favourably with Mr. Black.

“It's an awfully lucky thing as it turns out, old fellow, that I should have been shut up in this deadly lively little hole for the last twelve months, otherwise we should have been up a tree,” Hall said, as he leaned comfortably back in his corner of the carriage. “My income, as I told you, is quite sufficient for my wants, but I always contrive to have spent every penny of it by the end of the year. I am not an extravagant man, as you know; I couldn't be, honestly, on four hundred a year; but I am fond of books and engravings, and so the

money slips away. However, as it is I have plenty for the next six months, and by that time you will be well able to return and claim your own."

It was lucky, as he said, for though I possessed a fortune I had no command whatever over it. It was easy enough to place my diamonds within the safe walls of the bank, but the difficulty of getting them out again at that time was insurmountable.

For obvious reasons I wished to remain as much in seclusion as possible until I had left the neighbourhood of Mr. Black and all who had known me since my illness; and therefore Hall went to the bank on my behalf to request the restitution of my property, he having placed it there originally.

To our intense annoyance—although I see now he could not possibly have acted otherwise—the manager of the bank positively refused to give the gems up to any one but the rightful owner. This would not have

been a matter of great importance, however, if he had only desired to see me for the purpose of handing over my property, but he told Hall he should require me in his presence to write a formal acknowledgment of the receipt of the jewels, and that my signature would have to be witnessed.

This, of course, was an absolute impossibility. I might have acquired sufficient skill to have signed my name after two or three days' diligent practice, but to a man completely ignorant of spelling, as well as caligraphy, the writing even of the most simple acknowledgement would have been out of the question.

Much to our chagrin, therefore, we were compelled to let the jewels remain where they were, until I had gained the requisite knowledge—Hall explaining somewhat lamely to the bank manager, that, after all, as I was going to travel about for a time, I thought I would prefer to leave my property in such safe keeping.

Hall had secured rooms in advance not

three minutes distant from the cathedral, and on Saturday, after a tedious railway journey, we arrived at Winchester.

The next morning we attended the service, most of which I found almost unintelligible; but although I did not understand in the least what he felt, I was deeply interested and almost moved to see the reverent rapture which lighted my friend's face as he gazed around him.

We walked through the great solemn building very silently, when the white-robed clergymen and choristers had disappeared. And then we emerged again into the cold white sunlight, and wended our way into some fields which, intersected by running brooks, lay at the foot of a grand green hill.

Hall turned his face to me full of suppressed emotion, and I fancy the surprise I felt must have appeared in my countenance, for he said—

“I am afraid I am a dull companion, Friend, but it is the very intensity of my

enjoyment which makes me so silent. Every step that we have taken has innumerable associations for me, connected with my childhood and early boyhood. The very spirit of my mother seems to hover over me."

I did not answer. What could I have said that would not have jarred upon him?

Presently my companion roused himself from his reverie of retrospection, and together we commenced planning for the future. I was eager to begin my studies the very next morning, and would not hear of a week being set aside that I might get to know the place better first.

"For heaven's sake, Hall," I cried, "do not let us waste time. My ignorance seems to weigh more heavily upon me here than it did in that ugly bare little town we have left behind us. There what I saw I could understand at least; here everything seems to whisper to me of a bygone time which is dark to me."

Therefore the following morning we set to work in earnest.

The days passed all too quickly, and signs of spring began to appear. The little brooks re-commenced their interrupted murmuring songs which had been choked by the snow and ice of winter, and the birds began to twitter on the leafless boughs. All nature seemed to call upon me to leave my work, and to rejoice with her that the beautiful spring time had again striven successfully against the dreary winter season, but no answering enthusiasm was awakened in my breast. I was full of a feverish restless desire to learn, and I would willingly have remained at my books all day had not my kind adviser placed a decided veto against this.

From nine until twelve each morning he allowed me to study, and again for a couple of hours in the afternoon, but more than this he would not permit. The rest of our time we spent in walking and

bicycling, with an occasional game of football with the local club.

Hall's task was indeed a difficult one, but unwearingly he strove in my cause, and resolutely he cheered and encouraged me throughout.

I know now how often I must have tried his patience; he was of a most sensitive, nervous temperament, and at first I could see that my dense ignorance seemed almost to crush and paralyse him. It was so hard for him to render his explanations at the same time sufficiently simple and sufficiently conclusive. I asked a child's questions, it is true; but the reply that would have satisfied a child did not answer the purpose with me at all.

How it was that he did not lose heart entirely during the first month that we were together I cannot imagine. Heaven grant me his patience, if ever I be called upon to help another as he helped me.

Looking back, I can see that I was thoroughly, blindly, egotistical at this period.

I could think or talk of nothing but myself and my own progress. But he never flinched, or showed a sign of weariness. Morning after morning he would sit down, and, lighting his pipe, would patiently dwarf his vigorous mind to my level, guiding my awkward hand and hesitating tongue.

My cheek flushes even now as I remember my selfish absorption, nor shall I ever forget the overwhelming sense of shame I experienced when I first recognised it for myself.

It was Christmas Day ; a bright frosty morning. The ground was dry and hard, and from the windows we could see the frost sparkling and glittering upon the black boughs of the trees.

The breakfast cleared away, I gathered my books and writing materials together, and placed them on the table. But Hall did not draw up his chair as usual.

“Come, Hall,” I said, “I am ready.”

He did not reply at once, and I turned round in surprise. His face was pale, and his eyes were heavy and languid ; all

this I recollect now, but at the time I perceived nothing of it.

“Haven’t you your pipe ? ” I said.

“ Yes, old fellow, it is here.”

“Then come along, it’s past nine.”

He advanced to my side, and, shutting the book I held, said kindly—

“Put them away to-day, old man. It is Christmas morning, you know. We must make a holiday of it.”

“But I don’t want a holiday. For mercy’s sake Hall, don’t treat me as if I were in reality a child. Let us get to work. I have more holidays than I wish for as it is, I would study willingly all day and all night if you would let me. Come, dear old fellow.”

With a sigh Hall sat down and at once plunged into our usual routine. Question, answer, question, answer, quickly they followed one another, but presently Hall took his pipe from his lips and leant his brow upon his hand.

For an instant he remained thus, and then

with a groan rose, and walking to the window opened it, letting in a rush of cold fresh air.

"It's no good, Friend," he said faintly, "I must knock off to-day. I am dead beat."

With an exclamation of dismay I hurried to him, and then the truth flashed across me; in his pale face and tired eyes I could read it distinctly. I had worn my only friend out in my service.

Bitterly remorseful I felt, but he would not listen to my self-reproaches for an instant.

"Come, old fellow," he said "stop that. You have nothing to forgive yourself; how could you know that your power of learning was greater than mine to teach? It is my own fault entirely. I should have been honest with you and told you the truth sooner. I should be more ashamed than I am to have broken down if I did not know one thing, and that is, that no teacher ever before had such an alarmingly apt pupil as you are. Your capability of

study is something marvellous to me I must admit."

I saw that it was his wish that the subject should be dropped, therefore I did not attempt to pursue it; but though my heart ached for many an hour afterwards, and several days passed before I could at all shake off the effects of the occurrence, I am thankful now I received the shock when I did, otherwise I might have become a thoroughly hardened selfish man; and what more detestable and despicable creature can exist than he whose Alpha and Omega is himself?

We did no more work for that day, or indeed for a week after; a portion of the time we spent in returning to Lancashire and reclaiming my diamonds, and the rest in lounging about the neighbourhood of Winchester. Then, refreshed and invigorated, we resumed our interrupted pursuits.

I would not willingly be tedious; though this portion of my history is full of interest to me, I cannot hope that it will prove so to

others. I will merely say that after a lapse of another six months I was to all intents and purposes a very fairly well educated man, though I could not at that time have passed a university examination.

As Hall remarked, I sucked in learning like a sponge, and what I once mastered I never forgot. In all the more practical branches of education, such as grammar, geography, and even mathematics, I could have competed successfully with Hall himself. The modern languages, too, came to me it seemed perfectly naturally; but, to my friend's disappointment, history, and all classical subjects, were to me utterly uninteresting.

"I cannot understand you," he said one day; "I thought the very atmosphere of this place, teeming as it does with historical associations, would have affected you as it does me; in fact, I brought you here on that account. The glorious old cathedral alone, I fancied would prove a link between you and the past; and I don't believe you care one pin about it."

“You are right,” I replied, with rather a mournful shake of the head; “there is doubtless something wanting about me altogether. I admire the cathedral from a structural point of view; but I’ll be hanged if I feel any delight in wandering about it, and sitting and musing in it’s sombre shades. I must own it gives me fifty times more pleasure to see a fine sunset, or even, I am ashamed to say, to watch a dozen companies of soldiers parading in the barrack ground yonder.”

This was indeed the truth, and sometimes I would grow very melancholy as I recognised the wide difference that existed between me and others. I believed this difference to be even wider than it was in reality, for I took Hall as a sample of men in general with regard to his tastes, whereas now I know that not one in a thousand has the same reverence for the past and all connected with it that he has.

But, as a rule, I was well content and even happy. My health was perfect. My

mind was continually occupied, and pleasantly occupied too, and each day my affection for my companion grew warmer and more steady.

All this time, however, only one very slight rift had appeared in the cloud which hung over my past, and that had closed again so rapidly and completely, that I sometimes was almost inclined to doubt whether the momentary flash had ever in reality occurred.

One day, with Hall's help, I was patiently working out a problem in Euclid. Before I had arrived at the point which could have rendered it intelligible to me, of a sudden a peculiar sensation came over me.

"Don't say another word to me, Hall," I cried; "I can't imagine what is going to happen, my head feels very strange. I can solve this problem without reading any further."

He looked at me in surprise.

"That's impossible, dear boy," he cried; "this is far in advance of anything you have

tackled yet; and, to tell you the truth, I must go on a bit further myself before I can grasp it. I have learnt it once, of course, but I've forgotten it."

"Nevertheless I know what it is perfectly well," I cried excitedly; and thereupon I proceeded to propound fully and clearly the solution of the problem.

For an instant Hall gazed at me in extreme astonishment, and then his cheeks flushed, and his eyes grew bright with hope.

"You are not playing me a trick, old fellow?" he asked, anxiously; "you have not been getting this up on the quiet?"

"On my honour, no," I replied earnestly. "My mind so far as recollection goes was a perfect blank until you reached that particular point, and then it all came into my brain with a sort of a rush. What does it mean, Hall? For Heaven's sake tell me what you think it means?"

"Steady, steady, Friend," he replied. "My dear fellow, keep cool, whatever you

do, or you will lose yourself again. I firmly believe you are on the threshold of your past at this moment. Now think, calmly and collectedly, think. Can you remember nothing in association with that problem; nothing of the circumstances under which you worked it out before?"

For some minutes I sat trying to force my brain backward——

"No," I replied with a sigh. "I can't remember any thing worth remembering. And yet it is a curious thing when I think of that problem I cannot dissociate it in my mind from one or two most absurd things."

"How do you mean?" he asked anxiously. "Tell me whatever is in your mind, Friend; it may be of more importance than you think."

"Well, then," I said, "I associate it with extreme oppressive heat; with a shady room, a glaring sun outside, with white-robed figures passing and repassing each other, and a strange shadowy thing waving

above me and creating a sort of draught. I assure you when the solution flashed across me just now, I instinctively raised my head, expecting to feel upon my forehead a cool breath of air."

"Is that all?" cried Hall.

"Yes, that is absolutely all; and what's the good of that?"

"Perhaps more than either you or I can say just at present," he responded. "But it seems to me to settle one important matter."

"What is that?" I cried.

"Why, you were educated evidently in one of the tropical countries. I should be inclined to think some part of India probably, for that is particularly the country of punkahs. One of the ships that was lost that night, the "Shark," was an Indian ship. It isn't much of a clue certainly, but it's something."

For days after this I lived in constant anticipation of some fresh symptom of returning power, but it did not come,

and the disappointment I felt, although I tried to conceal it from my companion, was so keen that insensibly it began to tell upon my health, and my studies for the first time became irksome and wearisome.

It seemed to me I knew all I cared to know, and on Hall's questioning me I confessed as much to him.

"I can see what it is," he said, "you want a change, and to stretch your wings a bit. Come, my boy, we'll shut up the books until you feel inclined to open them again, which may be never; well, it won't much signify even in that case. I'd back you heavily against any man of ordinary education who hasn't gone in for study as a pastime. You have a wonderfully clear shrewd brain. I wish mine was half as clear. Now then what do you say to a run on the continent? It would do wonders for your French and German."

Of course I made no objection, so we started straight away from Southampton,

as Hall wished to visit for a day or two a college chum of his who lived in Jersey.

Through this friend I disposed of some of the smallest of my diamonds; in fact that had been Hall's object in stopping at Jersey. Our funds were running out; but the sale of these stones resulting in a profit of seven hundred pounds, we were able to leave four hundred in the bank, with the remainder of the diamonds, and proceed on our way comfortably supplied.

CHAPTER V.

THROUGH France, stopping only one night in Paris, we proceeded straight to Italy, and then we commenced what I believe is regarded as the proper regulation tour.

Rome, Venice, Milan, Florence ; each city was visited in its turn, and its churches and galleries thoroughly “done” by us. I tried to enjoy myself and to appear properly interested in what I saw, but every night when I retired to my room I confessed bitterly to myself that my efforts had resulted in nothing.

The gay street scenes, and picturesque costumes of the people, pleased and amused me, but the bright approaches invariably ended in some dismal, dark, religious edifice,

whose every niche and corner was eloquent of the past, that past from which I felt myself cut off by an awful impassable barrier, the barrier of complete oblivious forgetfulness.

The great men of the world, whose tombs seemed to crowd around me—those master minds, who throughout the universe, by reason of their common human nature, are proudly claimed as brethren—I had no affinity with. In the open air, in the cheery sunlight, I was an ordinary mortal, capable of appreciating and enjoying life, but within these solemn shades a positive terror of myself would steal upon me, I was so utterly forlorn and alone; and when, on leaving the church, we would proceed to some famous picture gallery full of the portrayed agony of martyrs, my spirits, already terribly depressed, would sink to zero.

Six weary weeks I spent in this way; and then, on a return visit to Rome, things reached their climax, and I unburdened my mind.

One morning, having visited three picture galleries and one church, I was strolling by Hall's side, and beginning to congratulate myself that our sight-seeing was over for the day, when he suddenly pulled out his watch.

"Let me see," he said, "we have an hour yet before lunch; time enough, if we walk quickly, to hear the fag end of the service at St. Peter's."

I could bear it no longer. I felt almost a child's inclination to cry at the proposition, and I was obliged to wait a minute before I ventured to speak, in case my voice should tremble.

Hall stepped out briskly, and the grand old pile had loomed in sight before I could bring myself to break the silence.

"I must do it, however," I thought in despair; "another week of this will drive me mad, and if I don't speak to-day I never shall."

"Hall," I stammered, "wait a minute, old fellow, will you?"

He came to a stand-still.

“ Out with it, Friend,” he said, seeing that I hesitated. “ If we are to hear anything of the service, we mustn’t loiter.”

“ You are going to St. Peter’s on my account, are you not ? ” I inquired nervously.

“ Why, yes, mainly on your account.”

“ I mean, it wouldn’t be any deprivation to you not to hear the service to-day, would it ? ”

He raised his brows in surprise.

“ Of course not, Friend ; I have heard it dozens of times. But what on earth do you mean ? ”

“ I mean,” I cried, blurting out my trouble, “ that I can stand it no longer, Charlie. Oh, my dear old fellow, for pity’s sake don’t think me ungrateful ; if I can appreciate nothing else, at least I am fully alive to your sympathy and devotion ; but this tour has been a mistake, so far as I am concerned, I am afraid.”

“ A mistake ! How ? ” he murmured

gravely. "I thought the grand tour must be the very thing for you. Now-a-days no one's education is complete without it. It is the thing that every man looks forward to as the height of enjoyment."

"But do you not see the difference of my case?" I argued. "I have not looked forward to it. There is the nutshell which encloses the whole thing. Rome is no more to me than Paris, or than London; every place is equally new to me. Put yourself in my position, Hall, if you can. I have no desire to study the past, for this reason. Any way, I must come to an awful gap; and I am ashamed to say, while I know so little of myself, I have no wish to know more of others."

"I am afraid I am a fool," I continued dismally, "but if you could only understand the depression I have experienced in going through these endless galleries and churches, you would pity me, I know."

"My poor friend," he murmured, "I must have been blind indeed."

“On every side,” I cried, “I come in contact with things which seem to reproach me with my forgetfulness and to jeer at my pitiable condition. I never enter a gallery without hearing such exclamations as ‘Ah, here is the celebrated Apollo!’ or ‘This, then, is the Madonna that we have heard of so often.’ I have never heard of them; my dull brain wakes to no enthusiasm at the sight; and I feel myself the inferior of every man or woman that I meet. Despise me if you must, my friend; but pity me, for indeed my burden is very hard to bear.”

Ere the shades of night fell we had shaken the dust of ancient Rome from our feet, and were tearing through the darkness in the direction of Paris as quickly as the express could carry us.

Poor Hall, how careful he was! I can afford to smile at the recollection now, though my eyes grow misty even as I smile. How careful he was to propose nothing but the most frivolous forms of amusement to me in Paris, and, with his tastes, what

an uncomfortable week he must have spent.

We drove on the Bois, we promenaded the Champs Elysées and the Palais Royal, and at night we went to a theatre or café. Not one picture gallery or church did we enter.

Hall was usually a rapid walker, but even now I recollect perfectly well the extraordinary spurt he would put on whenever we approached the Louvre, or, crossing the Pont St. Denis, came into the historical shadow of Notre Dame. One day as we were passing the latter building I was forced to break into a run for a step or two in order to keep up with him.

“Hullo, old man!” I gasped, for the sun, even in September, shone too fiercely to make such a quick mode of progression agreeable, “are you walking for a wager, eh?”

“No,” he stammered confusedly, then looking round he pointed to a wooden building which stands immediately at the back of the cathedral, “that is the Morgue,”

he said, "the dead house of Paris." I always like to get by it quickly, especially in the hot weather."

I accepted this explanation in perfect good faith at the time, but Hall has confessed to me since that his aspersion on the sanitary condition of that most ghastly and much frequented institution was utterly undeserved. As he pointed out, there was certainly no mortuary near the Louvre. To this day he says with a laugh—

"I rushed past the places in case the temptation to enter and drag you with me should prove too strong for me."

For a fortnight I was genuinely amused with the life I led, and then, to my dismay, I began to feel the old sensations of restless depression creeping over me again.

I loved my friend, heaven knows I had reason; but no one can understand the utter loneliness I felt sometimes, as, sitting in the Tuileries Gardens, or in the green shades of the Bois de Boulogne, I would watch the family gatherings on every side

of me. A proud father and mother surrounded by their children sometimes would affect me so strangely that I would be compelled to move away.

The young French women in their tasteful elegant costumes I admired at a respectful distance, but the sight of a white-haired lady leaning on her stalwart son's arm would move me almost to tears, and my empty heart would cry out within me.

"If I had but a mother to love and care for! Oh, God above, if I only had!"

On one of these occasions I discovered that Hall's eyes were fixed anxiously on me.

"Friend," he said, "you are running down, shall we move on again?"

With a shrug of my shoulders I replied,

"As you like, Charlie; but I am afraid, dear boy, I am a hopeless sort of person. What use am I in the world? None, and I never shall be."

"Come, that's all nonsense," he said briskly. "I am going to turn you out something yet, or, if I don't, somebody

else shall. Look here, I want you to come and see a man I have heard of to-day, who is great on the subject of all sorts of brain vagaries, he may be able to suggest something."

I had no particular faith in the French savant, but, seeing that Hall wished it, I willingly consented to pay him a visit.

For half an hour Dr. Marion, the grey-haired courteous old physician questioned me, testing my memory in every possible way, and then, after reflecting a few minutes, he said in English, which he spoke with only an agreeable foreign accent.

"Dr. Hall, this is a case in which I frankly confess I can do nothing. You are in splendid physical condition, Mr. Perditus, to give you medicines of any sort would be to offer an insult to nature; in fact it would be, to use one of your most expressive but objectionable insular expressions, humbug. You can do nothing but wait and hope."

"But do you think," I cried—"tell me

the truth, doctor; don't spare me—do you think I shall ever recover my memory?"

He looked gravely at me for a minute, and then, placing his hand on my arm, he said with serious kindness—

"I will not attempt to deceive you—it is a cruel kindness to do so. I do not believe myself that you ever will recover. Within six months of your accident I should have had a different opinion; but it is now—how many months did you say?" turning to Hall.

"Fifteen months," he murmured, sorrowfully. "On the 4th of March, 1880, he was picked up at sea."

"Well then I should say the chances of recovery are very slight."

"You can give me no advice then?" I said, battling hard to keep control over myself.

"Yes," he replied, "I can, and I will. Make up your mind to the inevitable, my dear sir. Cease your useless regrets and

your strivings to remember. You cannot force nature to your own bent. Turn your back resolutely upon the past, live in the present, and look forward to the future. So your brain will grow healthier, and then who can say what might happen? You are well off, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is a pity; if you had had to work for your living it would have been better. You must occupy your brain somehow, and in your case I really think the excitement of money making would have been the best thing for you. As it is, however, you must set up a hobby, my dear sir. Go in for collecting pictures, or breeding horses and dogs; that's considered the correct thing for a monied man in England, is it not?"

"I don't know anything about that," I said; "but I must admit my tastes are not artistic, nor do I care for horses and dogs particularly."

Hall laughed.

“ You needn’t pull a long face about that, Perditus. You might certainly indulge in a little dog fancying if you felt inclined, but horses and pictures are quite beyond your means.”

“ But I understood you to say he was rich, did I not ? ” inquired Dr. Marion.

“ Well, not exactly rich,” replied Hall, “ I suppose he will have an income somewhere about two thousand a year.”

“ Mon Dieu ! is that all ? ” exclaimed the old man. “ My dear sir, I congratulate you ! Set to work, set to work at once. Why I am as rich a man as you are, and yet at past sixty years of age I work from ten until four every day of my life. An Englishman satisfied with a paltry two thousand a year ! You amaze me. Make your two thousand a year ten thousand, and then double that. England wouldn’t be what it is, my dear sir, the richest country in the world, if it’s men had had as little enterprise as you have. Come, now, give up lounging and lazing about ; put your shoulder to

the wheel, and do a man's work in the world."

The Frenchman had a clear, high, musical voice, and as it rang through the room it seemed to stir my very fibres. I rose and faced him.

"God bless you, sir!" I cried. "You have put heart in me. But my means are sufficient for my wants. If I only had some one to work for—some one besides myself——"

With a gesture of his hand he stopped me.

"Mon ami," he said very gravely, "what I hear then of your England cannot surely be true."

"How? What do you hear?"

His eyes grew soft and full of pity, as he continued—

"I hear of houseless wretched men and women, and of children, who starve in the midst of plenty. With these about you, can you say you have no incentive to work? Your life is empty now. Look around you ;

open your heart to the miseries and troubles of others; in alleviating their's your own will lift and fade away."

I was very touched at his earnestness, and seeing this he took me by the hand and shook it warmly.

"There I have done," he said. "I am afraid, my friend, I have not been strictly professional in my treatment of you, but have rather encroached on the province of the priest. It is the unusual interest of your case that has startled me into this little sermon, however, so you must forgive me. Now, good bye, and good luck. Nay"—interrupting a surreptitious and furtive movement of Hall's hand, which contained a little white paper packet—"indeed you must not insist, or you will pain me. I do not sell advice of this sort, sir. But if you wish to give me a pleasure, gentlemen, visit me as a friend whenever you come to Paris. My interest is strongly excited. Satisfy it, and you will do me a real service."

How brightly the sun shone; how sweetly

the gentle breezes fanned and cooled our faces as we turned our backs upon the old doctor's house, and stepped briskly outwards.

"Hall," I said, "has any change come over the scene since we have been in that house, or is the alteration only in myself? Half an hour ago I was oppressed and scorched with the heat, and blinded with the glare of the sun; now, everything looks lovely to me"—I stopped suddenly—"except that!" I cried. "Oh, Hall, see there, that poor old wretch with the bundle of rags on his back! Here, wait a minute——"

I ran to the old man, and giving him a coin which caused him to stare in astonishment, I rejoined my companion.

"What a miserable spectacle," I said, with a shudder.

"But, my dear fellow, you've seen heaps of them before."

"What?" I cried.

"That old fellow was a chiffonnier, or in

other words a licensed dealer in garbage. There are dozens of them about: I don't think I have ever been out in Paris without coming in contact with one at least."

"That's curious, too," I replied thoughtfully. "I have been here a fortnight, and I declare to you I have never noticed one of them."

"Oh, your eyes have been turned inwards, not outwards, my boy. You are beginning to look about you—that's what it is, Friend."

This remark of his set me thinking; and after a spell of silence I faltered out—

"Hall, there is something I want you to tell me."

My serious tone startled him a little, evidently.

"What is it, old fellow? Fire away!"

"I want to know for my own satisfaction how it has been possible to you to make a friend of me? I know you love me. I should be an ungrateful wretch if I doubted it, even in my own mind; but what on

earth you can have seen in me to care for I cannot imagine. Do you know, during these last few minutes, an extraordinary power seems to have come to me—the power of seeing myself as I have been for the last ten months, but as I will be no longer, please God. Oh, Hall, how can you have put up with such a selfish brute?”

“I have waited for this moment,” he said, looking at me in proud affection. “I knew it would come; I will tell you the truth, Friend, the honest plain truth. I was attracted by your appearance originally, and under the spell of that attraction I worked night and day to save your life. With God’s help I succeeded in that, and then for you there arose in my heart something of the tenderness I should imagine a woman feels towards the helpless child she has brought into the world. I pitied you from my very soul, and out of that pity grew a strange absorbing affection; and, as a mother exacts

no return from her child, so, in the first case, did I exact none from you."

"But afterwards—afterwards, Hall?" I cried; "it is of the last few months that I am so bitterly ashamed, before that I cannot consider that I was in the least accountable."

"I am a judge of character," Hall continued, "and, moreover, an obstinate believer in my own opinion. I knew that you were under a cloud, and also that the cloud would lift one day, and let your real nature appear as it is."

"I am sure I am glad you have had some comforting anticipation to uphold you under such an infliction as my society must have been," I murmured remorsefully.

Hall burst into a hearty laugh.

"Oh come, Friend," he cried, "don't paint the devil blacker than he need be. I have been as proud as Punch of you. Every time I have heard any one admire you—oh, nonsense, don't try to look innocent, we used to have a perfect trail of women after us in

those Italian galleries, and, judging from their most odious comparisons, I certainly was not the lode-star that attracted them,—at every complimentary expression that you excited, I tell you I used to plume my feathers. ‘You owe it all to me, mesdames,’ I would cry inwardly; ‘for all your gratification you would thank the black, clumsy, ugly man, if you gave thanks where thanks were due.’ ”

I shook my head with a deprecatory smile; but his railery amused me in spite of myself.

“That’s right, Friend,” he said; “cheer up, old man, you have not been by any means as bad as you think you have; but if you had been the most thorough-going egotist under the sun, such a moment as this would have rewarded me for all my sufferings.”

“One word more, Hall,” I said, laying my hand on his arm. “Do you agree with the French physician’s opinion as to my ultimate recovery?”

He considered a moment, and then replied gravely—

“Friend, I am in a most difficult position. I do not agree with Dr. Marion, although, for your sake, I almost wish I could tell you that I did. However, it must be admitted that his opinion is a far weightier one than mine, and in one thing I perfectly coincide with him. I advise you most strenuously, as he does, to look to the future, and to leave speculating about the past.”

“I will take your advice,” I said firmly. “I will not go out of my way to seek for evidence as to my former state; I will detach my mind from the past unless a clue is thrown in my way. Promise me, Hall, that you will help me if any such clue should come across my path, and then let the subject be dropped between us.”

He wrung my hand silently, but I understood him, and then he cried cheerily—

“Now then, what shall be our next move?”

“Let me go home again,” I said, “and set to work in some way. I feel an overwhelming desire upon me to have some settled occupation.”

“Very well, then,” he said readily, “we will return to-morrow. Having taken places at the opera to-night it is scarcely worth while wasting our tickets.”

“Certainly not,” I agreed; “I shouldn’t like to miss ‘Faust,’ for I can appreciate music at any rate.”

Our way back to our hotel lay past a stone building which had several times aroused my curiosity in consequence of the continual stream of excited looking men who were passing in and out. I had often intended inquiring what show was to be seen within it’s walls, but something had always distracted my thoughts ere the words had been spoken. This particular day it arrested my attention again.

“What entertainment goes on there?” I asked.

“Why that’s the Bourse,” he answered;

“the same sort of thing as the Stock Exchange, you know.”

“What do they do there?”

“Ah, my dear fellow, you must ask somebody else that question. The buying and selling of stocks and shares has always been a mystery to me. I believe the business is to sell what you haven’t got to somebody who doesn’t want it, and to make an enormous profit by the transaction. However, if you would like to see something of the real spirit of money making, let us turn in here for a minute. That is the difference between the Bourse and Stock Exchange; here they admit the public; there I suppose they don’t care to have witnesses of their wild excitement and extravagances.”

For half an hour I stood in the gallery over-looking the crowded hall, wrapt in the profoundest interest. To me there was an absorbing fascination about the scene. Here was excitement and energy and life at last. There was nothing absurd

to me in the frenzied gestures and wild gesticulations which went on in every direction. These men were terribly in earnest, they were working with a will at any rate.

Presently, immediately under where we stood, there was a momentary increase in the hum of voices, and then a sudden silence. The crowd parted, and I saw two men supporting to the fresh air another, who was evidently fainting.

“What’s the matter?” I enquired of Hall.

“Oh, that’s a frequent occurrence, I should think. The wonder to me is that these fellows stand the strain of excitement as long as they do. One can’t run the chance of winning or losing a fortune in half an hour as these men do without suffering for it in the end. Why, I know a stockbroker in England who made a hundred thousand pounds in one transaction alone. But come along now, my boy, if you have had enough of it; a little of it goes a long way with me.”

I would willingly have spent the whole of my afternoon there, but I had learnt my lesson, and I turned to come away at once. The scene, and my friend's words, however, haunted me until the glorious music of "Faust" banished that and everything else from my mind.

CHAPTER VI.

THOSE who know the Grand Opera at Paris will need no description of its glories from me; and those who do not would gain a very poor idea of it through my imperfect pen. In fact, judging from my own experience, descriptions of buildings always leave a most vague and unsatisfactory impression on the mind. Suffice it therefore to say that I was thoroughly delighted with all that I saw and heard.

For the first time I experienced a sensation of real enjoyment; some barrier between me and pleasure seemed to have been removed, and an oppressive weight to have been lifted off my mind.

My eyes wandered round the brilliant scene eagerly, and I soon became aware of a new capability of observation. I might almost have imagined that all sorts of little incidents had been prepared for my especial gratification, had I not been shrewd enough to recognise the truth, which was that at length I had broken free from the chains which bound me to myself, and in a few short hours my fellow creatures had become objects of interest to me entirely apart from any connection with myself.

So delighted was I to discover this fact, that I gave myself up to looking about me, and the inspired music of "Faust" served as a dreamy lovely accompaniment to this newly-found pleasure.

I enjoyed myself silently, however, for one glance at my companion showed me that to have interrupted his genuine appreciation of the opera would have been a positive cruelty.

During the first act my attention wandered in every direction, but at the be-

ginning of the second it became riveted, and it never strayed again.

The house had been crowded from the commencement; in fact, every place appeared to me to be occupied, with the exception of one rather small private box, which was situated at a short distance from the spot where Hall and I were sitting.

In my newly-awakened interest in things generally, I was wondering why this box alone should remain empty, when suddenly the door at the back opened and I saw two persons enter. For an instant they remained in the shadow removing cloaks and wraps, and then the more important of the two figures advanced to the front and took her seat.

Fascinated I gazed at her, and as I gazed a strange chilling sense of uneasiness began to creep over me.

The woman before me inspired me with a strong sense of nervous dislike; but at the same time I was perfectly aware that there was a repugnant attraction about her

which rendered her far more interesting to me than any of the beautiful women by whom I was surrounded.

Can I convey any impression of her, I wonder? I will try.

I saw before me a woman of about five and forty years of age, with a countenance which, even softened by the distance of fifty yards or so, struck me as being the most cruel and repulsive I had ever looked upon. The forehead was low, but the face was very large and of a deathly pallor; the hair was positively black, as were also the enormously thick, straight, scowling eyebrows; the eyes—small, dark, and piercing—even from where I sat I could see reflected the light in a strange steely glitter. The nose was broad and flat, and the nostrils distended, but it was in the large, coarse mouth, and heavy brutal jaw, that the principal repulsion of the face lay.

A strongly - defined black moustache fringed the upper lip, which was drawn slightly back so as to habitually show the

teeth ; but what rendered the face almost unspeakably repellant was the livid purple hue of the lips. Only once have I seen anything like the colour of those dreadful lips, and that was some years afterwards, when, in the Morgue, I looked upon the corpse of a man who had been killed by strangulation.

The woman was dressed in a gown of scarlet satin, and showed her bare neck and a pair of strong finely-formed white arms. Her hands were ungloved and singularly small and delicate for her size, and the fingers were covered with sparkling, brilliant rings.

So absorbed was I in the contemplation of this forbidding-looking person that I had entirely forgotten that she had a companion with her, until I saw her turn her head and, with a peremptory action, beckon to the other, who had up to this time remained in the shadow at the back.

Then there came to the front of the box a creature in such startling contrast to the

other that it was with difficulty I suppressed a smothered ejaculation of astonishment.

The new comer was a young girl of about seventeen years of age. She was clad in some dark, heavy looking material which rendered her conspicuous among the throng of very-much-dressed—or, to speak more correctly, undressed—women around, and at once I surmised that she wore the costume peculiar to some convent school. But her face it was that caused my heart to beat with surprise, and then to ache with sympathy.

Fair she was, and soft and gentle ; her golden hair streamed over her shoulders and curled in short natural curls round her forehead ; the cheek was pale, and the sweet mouth was sad and drooping, but the eyes, full of a wistful pathos, pierced me to the very soul.

I drew my breath pantingly as I gazed at her ; I seemed to recognise a strange affinity between us. There was a desolate look in

those wistful eyes which was echoed in my own heart. At once I made out her story.

“Who could look upon her,” I thought, “and not read it? She is alone in the world, as I am. There is no sympathy between her and that horror next her; how could there be? As soon expect the dove to consort with the vulture.”

So wrapt was I in my contemplation of the incongruous ill-assorted pair, that the act came to an end without my noticing it. I was roused by Hall tapping me on the shoulder.

“Come, old chap,” he said, “let us have a turn in the foyer; the place is getting tremendously hot.”

“You go, Charlie; I would rather stay here,” I replied.

“Why what on earth for?” he asked in surprise; then with a chuckle he continued, “Oh, I see, there is some attraction in one of the boxes, eh?”

“Tell me, Hall,” I said, “what do you think of them?”

“Think of whom?”

“Why those ladies in the third box to the left.”

“Give me the glasses old man; my eyes are not so good as yours. Oh, by Jove!” he ejaculated, and then he became silent.

“Well?” I asked impatiently.

“Well, my boy, I think they represent the wolf and the lamb as well as any couple I ever saw. Upon my soul I am sorry for the little girl if she is destined to pass much of her time in the society of that most ghastly personage in red.”

“But don’t you think it a beautiful appealing face?” I inquired anxiously.

“Which?” he said laughingly.

“Don’t be absurd, Hall,” I replied in some wrath; “the young girl’s, of course.”

He glanced at me with a merry twinkle in his eye.

“Come along, old fellow,” he whispered. “Too much gazing at the moon, you know, is apt to prove injurious. It’s a pretty, interesting little face, I admit; but, my

dear fellow, she can't be more than sixteen or thereabouts, and you must be at least ten or twelve years older. Take my advice, strangle this incipient interest in its birth."

I shook myself free of his arm.

"It is her very childishness and weakness that makes her so interesting to me," I said impatiently. "I cannot bear to think of that gentle girl having to associate with that awful loud-voiced, cruel looking creature. Listen, Hall, we can hear her strident tones even at this distance, and see how the young girl shrinks from the notice the other woman seems to court. It makes my blood boil to witness her distress. I would give all I possess to be able to step in and save her from such companionship as that."

With a shrug of his shoulders Hall replied,

"It's all very nice and chivalrous, my dear fellow, but untold wealth wouldn't purchase you that right. Besides, old boy, when you have had my experience you will know how ridiculous it is to be guided by

external appearances. I don't like the look of the old lady, I'll admit ; but she may be a very worthy soul for all that, and most probably the girl is her daughter, fresh home from a convent school, and as timid and nervous as a young fawn."

I answered hotly—

"You don't mean what you say, Hall. That girl—that awful woman's daughter! I'd stake my soul they are no relations at all. It is impossible you can believe they are ; you only say so to annoy me."

Hall raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"I don't understand you, Friend," he said, somewhat stiffly. "I have come to no conclusion at all on the subject, of course. But one thing I do know, and that is that surely these persons are not of sufficient interest to us to warrant our quarrelling on their account."

My face grew as hot as fire, and an overwhelming sense of shame swept over me. I scarcely dared to raise my eyes to his serious face.

“Let us get away from here,” I murmured. “Don’t let me look at them again. Oh, Hall! forgive me, forgive me! The day that severs our friendship I pray God may be my last.”

“Hush, old man!” he said soothingly. “You shouldn’t take things so seriously. I was only a little bit huffed; but I agree with you we won’t finish ‘Faust’ this evening. Let us have a little turn among the trees and a cigar, and then bed. You have had your fill of excitement to-day, and remember we have a long journey to-morrow.”

But while he was putting the glasses in the case, I took the opportunity of once more surreptitiously glancing over my shoulder in the direction of the box. The young girl had drawn further back into the shade; but the elder woman, with her bare elbows on the edge of the box, leant forward, boldly scrutinising the crowd below her.

CHAPTER VII.

HALL and I quitted Paris the following evening, but we did not pursue the same route to England. The previous night we had agreed it would be better for him to pay another visit to Jersey and get his friend's advice as to the sale of the remainder of the diamonds, for I had determined to realise my property at once, if possible, and then to turn my attention to finding some lucrative exciting business.

During our conversation, while, cigar in mouth, we paced slowly up and down the moonlit Champs Elysées, it suddenly occurred to me with a shock that again my egotism was forcing itself to the front. I desired to return to England, therefore to

England we were returning, but Hall's wishes on the subject had not been taken into consideration.

Expressing myself remorsefully to this effect, it was the greatest relief to me to find that at length our ideas coincided exactly. It seemed that the old French physician had struck a chord in my friend's heart as well as in mine.

“My conscience pricked me severely, Friend,” he said. “I am eight-and-twenty, and I passed my final medical examination six years ago. I have always been intending to settle down into regular practice. In fact, I went to the little hospital to get into a habit of steady work, if possible, but somehow or other I have let things slip. Now we will both go into harness together. I tell you what we will do. I shall sell out a portion of my shares, and furnish a small house in a good part of London; then I shall set up a brass plate and begin work in earnest.”

By dint of repeated questions I ascer-

tained that by the sale of these shares his income would be considerably reduced ; but more than half an hour elapsed before he would consent to my means being used to set us up in housekeeping. At length, however, he gave in.

“ You would argue the hind leg off a blind horse, Friend,” he said, with a laugh. “ It’s a pity it takes such a lot of preparation to make a barrister ; you would be a splendid special pleader.”

“ The bar wouldn’t do for me, Hall,” I answered decidedly. “ I want to make money faster than that : besides, it doesn’t seem to me that any particular talent was necessary to overthrow your argument in this instance. Look at the matter from an impartial point of view. You really injure yourself, so far as I can understand, by disturbing your money, while I have a lot of uninvested capital ready to hand ; besides, dear old fellow, don’t you see it is to be my home as much as yours—half the expenses are mine by right.”

Hall shrugged his shoulders.

“Have it your own way, Friend,” he said, “on one condition; and that is, that you allow me to repay my half by instalments.”

“All right,” I replied, “then that is settled.”

At first it was proposed that we should go together to Jersey, but after a night's sleep I came to the conclusion that on Hall's account I would suggest my journeying straight to London, while he visited his old friend without me. All at once an uncomfortable impression came upon me. He had been tied to me for so long, how weary he must have become of my uncongenial society. Notwithstanding his unselfish love for me, surely it would be a relief to him to be free of me for two or three days.

As I anticipated, at the outset my suggestion was very badly received; but I persevered, and after a few minutes' warm

discussion Hall began to see some force in my arguments.

“I am not sure, Perditus, but that you are right, after all,” he said, looking gravely at me. “As for my friend being better pleased to see me without you, that’s all stuff and nonsense; but I think it might be a good thing for you if we did separate for a day or two. You will have to rely upon yourself presently, and perhaps it is as well that you begin at once. But I don’t like letting you out of my sight,” he continued tenderly. “When I see you depart I shall feel something like a poor old hen, who, having hatched a brood of ducklings, looks on in horror while they betake themselves to the water. However, no harm happens to them, despite their foster-mother’s agitation, nor will it to you.”

Hall saw me off by the evening express from Paris to Boulogne, and I had to struggle hard to banish the sense of desolation which came upon me as I watched his familiar

beloved face disappear. But I cheered myself up with the reflection that what I had done had been for the best. He might say what he liked, but I knew that the two old college chums would enjoy a chat over bygone days fifty times better without me, and the consciousness that I had given my dear friend a pleasure at the expense of myself was really so agreeable to me that at length I began to realize a certain sort of enjoyment in my lonely condition.

There was something exciting and adventurous in the situation, and it gave me a sense of importance I had not felt before. I began to wish almost that Hall had not provided so carefully for every contingency of my journey. As it was, however, he had spent quite an anxious half hour in putting down on paper the plainest, fullest directions as to the course I was to pursue.

“If I loved him less,” I thought, as I gazed dreamily out of the window into the blackness of the night, “I could almost find it in my heart to let this little fluttering

piece of paper free to fly wherever it listeth, and trust to my own intelligence to find my way ; but as it is I will adhere to its orders as strictly as though I feared the consequences of doing otherwise. I would not run the risk of giving him an extra moment's anxiety for the world."

By-and-bye I fell asleep, and I was still drowsy when, with the other passengers, I was desired to proceed on board the packet with all possible dispatch.

The night was beginning to lift by this time, and a few silvery streaks on the horizon heralded the near approach of day ; therefore, unlike the majority of the passengers, I determined to remain on deck and watch the sun rise.

When the commotion of starting had subsided, I looked around me in the dusky grey light. The deck was almost bare, but at the further end of the steamer I could discern dimly two or three muffled-up figures. I turned my back on them, and lighting my cigar leant my elbows on the

rail that surrounded the upper deck and watched the lights of Boulogne grow yellower and yellower as the shadows rolled away, and the daylight strengthened; but presently I began to stamp my feet.

“The morning air is cold,” I muttered; “I will go for a brisk walk. I suppose dear old Charlie is well on his way by now.”

There was a good swell on the water and a stiff breeze blowing; but I plunged my cold fingers into my pockets and with bent head faced it, and commenced diligently pacing the deck.

I had traversed almost the entire length, when suddenly I was brought to a complete standstill, for there I saw to my astonishment—seated by the side of a muffled-up elderly lady—the young girl who had so strangely and unreasonably excited my interest at the Opera House the preceding evening.

The blood seethed in my brain, and every pulse in my body began to throb; but, by an effort, I controlled myself, and deliber-

ately turning on my heel walked rapidly away from her.

“Calmly, calmly, Friend Perditus,” I muttered to myself, “the conventionalities of life must not be outraged; you have not been introduced to that young lady; therefore, although you would give your ears for an opportunity of making her acquaintance, you had better keep a discreet distance from her until you are quite master of yourself.”

Five minutes later I approached the same spot again, keeping my eyes steadily fixed upon the slender form before me. I could see from the tell-tale blood which rushed to her fair cheek that she was aware of my coming, but to my inexpressible disappointment she kept her eyes studiously averted from mine.

Looking from her to her elderly companion I found however that I was being very sternly watched, and that the old lady evidently resented as an impertinence the interest that I imagine was very plainly shown in my face.

Rising hastily, she gathered her multitudinous wraps together, and, clutching her young companion's arm, said, in tones of querulous annoyance—

“Come down stairs, young lady, at once; we had better suffer sea-sickness than rudeness.”

I felt as though a pail of cold water had been dashed in my face; I had not lived with Charles Hall for more than a year to remain ignorant of the delicate respect with which women should be treated, and the thought that my want of politeness had occasioned these ladies actual discomfort was inexpressibly mortifying to me.

They were already nearing the stairs which led down to the cabin before I could make up my mind what to do; then I placed myself directly in their path, and doffing my cap stood bareheaded before them.

“Madam,” I said humbly to the irate elder lady, “I owe both you and this young lady many apologies for my want of cour-

tesy; but indeed I intended no rudeness to either of you."

The old woman waved me off, saying grimly—

"I don't know what you consider rudeness, sir; but it seems to me an exceedingly ungentlemanly thing to positively stare a young lady out of countenance. Let us pass, if you please."

"Not until you say that you forgive me," I cried earnestly; "it makes me miserable to feel that I am forcing you to go down into that wretched stuffy cabin."

Still she looked angrily at me, but by degrees the frown died away, and an expression of comic perplexity came into her face.

"I really can't tell what to make of you, sir," she said; "you seem sincere when you say you intended no rudeness, but still——"

"Indeed, madam," I murmured, "I would not for the world offer you any disrespect."

Another minute the old lady hesitated, and then the hard lines round her mouth

relaxed, and a pleasant smile overspread her countenance.

“Well,” she said, “I am inclined to believe you, you don’t look like an impudent fellow, I am bound to admit that.”

I bowed low to them, and was turning away from them, when an unexpected lurch of the vessel caused the old lady to drop the rugs and wraps that she carried, and to totter forward.

Running to her assistance I prevented her falling, and then gathering her things together, I begged to be allowed to help her down the cabin stairs, which were steep and dangerous, if she still felt the same desire to go below.

With her head on one side she looked at me an instant, and then she said bluntly—

“Let us understand each other, young gentleman, if you please. I don’t want to go down into that cabin if I can help it, for I know I shall be sea-sick, and I won’t go down if you will give me your word to keep

at the other end of the vessel and leave us unmolested for the rest of the journey."

Deeply mortified I put the rugs which I held down upon the deck at her feet, and raising my cap, without a word walked away from them; but I had not taken a dozen steps before the vessel gave another lurch, and I heard a smothered exclamation of distress in my rear.

Turning involuntarily, I saw that the old lady had fallen upon the deck, and that her young companion was trying in vain to raise her.

Impulsively I ran back to them.

"Pray let me help you," I cried. "I will go away directly afterwards, only let me assist you now."

The old lady's face was puckered up with pain.

"Let you assist me!" she said testily. "I have no choice. I believe my ankle is sprained. Here is a pretty state of things. Ten boxes in the hold, besides all these things, and nobody to look after them."

While she bemoaned her fate, with the young girl's help I arranged the numerous rugs on the nearest seat, and then, returning to the sufferer, I lifted her easily in my arms, and placed her on the soft couch I had prepared.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" she cried; "was ever anything so unfortunate? I don't believe I could stand for a moment. It would have been bad enough, any way, to have met with such an accident; but with you"—to the young lady—"on my hands, too, I don't know what I am to do, I am sure."

"I am sorry," rejoined her companion, "to add to your troubles; but surely I can be of some service, can I not?"

"Good gracious, no!" was the irritable reply. "Do you suppose I can send you to look after our luggage?"

"Pray do not worry yourself on that account," I said soothingly. "You can command me in any way. You will really be doing me a kindness by employing me."

This offer of mine was very graciously received, but I was careful to keep at some little distance from the pair, until I saw that we were nearing our destination ; then I returned to them. The old lady gave a sigh of relief when she saw me.

“ Oh, here you are, are you ? I thought you had repented already of your offer, and had deserted us.”

“ Indeed, no,” I responded. “ I did not wish to intrude, but I have been within sight of you all the time.”

“ Ah, sir,” she said, “ I owe you an apology now. However, I am sure you will forgive an old woman’s querulousness. Don’t go away again, please. Indeed, I feel and appreciate your kindness, although I have accepted it so gracelessly.”

I was lucky in getting their luggage together without any mistake ; but when I had assisted the two ladies into an empty first-class carriage, the elder held out her hand, and, thanking me warmly, bade me farewell.

“You are quite sure I can do nothing for you at the other end?” I inquired wistfully.

I felt that I could not propose it, but I would have given a great deal to have made a third in their carriage.

She smiled kindly at me.

“No, indeed,” she said; “I have troubled you sufficiently already. After all, my foot is not so bad; I can stand now quite well.”

Still I hesitated.

“I should be so glad to be of any further service,” I murmured.

She regarded me steadily for a moment, and then a humorous twinkle appeared in her rather misty blue eyes.

“If that is really so, I should be sorry to thwart your wishes. I shall be very glad if you will see me safely into a cab presently. Come,” she said, pushing the carriage door open, “jump in. Don’t you see the train is just starting?”

She was right. It began to move as she spoke; but I managed to scramble in, and

perfectly contented I felt as I took my seat opposite the two ladies.

The old lady talked at first pleasantly and kindly, but after half an hour or so she fell into a deep sleep, and under cover of her heavy, sonorous breathing, I was able to converse unrestrainedly with her gentle companion.

Had I known more of the laws of society I should probably have been less at my ease than I was; but I was ignorant that I was committing any solecisms when I asked the questions which my deep interest prompted, nor did the young girl apparently think me unduly curious. Indeed it seemed to be a relief to her to tell me her story.

It appeared on the death of her mother she had been placed in a convent school in Paris twelve years before, when she was but five years of age—she was now seventeen—and there she had remained, seldom quitting its walls, until she reached the age of fifteen. Then a terrible trouble had come upon her. Her father had been

smitten down by apoplexy on learning the loss of his entire fortune, and on her fifteenth birthday she had received the news that she was an orphan and penniless. In this awful emergency the lady with whom I had seen her at the Opera came forward and offered her a home.

“But surely,” I cried with blameable imprudence, “surely you could not wish to become a member of that lady’s family.”

She looked at me in surprise.

“I mean,” I stammered, “I noticed you at the Opera last night, and I fancied you did not appear congenial.”

“Were you there?” she exclaimed in girlish wonder. “I did not see you, how very strange.”

Then the brightness faded out of her eyes again, and she continued pathetically—

“I don’t think we should judge any one entirely by outward appearances, do you? You must recollect that this lady is a complete stranger to you. She has acted most generously towards me for two years,

and now that she can no longer bear the expense of my keep I am no less grateful to her. But for her I must have begun the battle of life when my father died; and it would have been harder for me at fifteen than at seventeen, that I am sure you will admit. I am on my way to my first situation as a nursery governess now."

I was infinitely touched; there was something so brave and yet so unhappy in the soft appealing eyes.

"But have you no one to stand between you and the buffets of the world?" I cried.

"I have no one," she replied, her eyes filling with tears. "I must rely upon myself alone. I have no friend except the lady you saw me with, and no money."

After this by mutual consent we relapsed into silence. From time to time I looked at her. She still kept her head turned from me, but ever and anon I could see the little hand steal furtively to her face, and I knew that she was quietly weeping.

“Poor friendless child,” I thought, “our lots are cast in rugged places. Fate has used us cruelly, both of us. Even now she mocks and torments me. I must sit quietly by and see you suffer, knowing all the while that if society permitted I could make your life a happy one, and ease your mind of all anxiety and trouble.”

By-and-bye my companion turned to me again; her eyelids still bore the traces of tears, but her face and manner were quite composed.

“I must apologise, sir,” she said with a quiet dignity quite unusual at her age. “I am afraid you will think me very weak. I resolved so firmly last night that I would not break down, whatever happened; but you see my good resolutions already have come to nothing. It shall not occur again, however, I am determined. I am no worse off after all than many have been before me. At least I am well educated, which is a great blessing, is it not?”

“ Indeed it is,” I answered readily, “ the greatest blessing nowadays.”

I spoke cheerfully, for I would not for the world have chilled her brave spirit, but my heart was very sore, for she looked so fragile—so much in want of a protector.

I considered a few minutes longer, and then I said :

“ I am sure you will acquit me of any impertinence, but I should be very glad if you would tell me your name and where you are going to live. I have no settled address in London at present, but when I have I should like to send it to you ; it might be a comfort to you to know that a faithful friend was within call in case of need.”

Impulsively she clasped her little hands together with an exclamation of gratitude ; but after a minute’s reflection she shook her head gravely.

“ I cannot do that,” she said wistfully, looking at me ; “ I should like to, but it would not be right.”

“But why not? What harm could there possibly be?” I asked eagerly.

“I don’t know,” she answered simply; “but the Lady Superior, when she bade me farewell at the convent, warned me that I must be very careful, and circumspect, she called it. Therefore,” she continued with a piteous little action of the hands, “you see that it is impossible for me to reply to you. I am so ignorant, and the Lady Superior meant kindly towards me. You would not ask me to disregard her counsels, would you?”

Her earnest appeal silenced me. I did not dare to tempt her from what she considered right. My knowledge of the world was slight, heaven knows, but my instinct taught me I should be doing this young girl an irremediable injury if I persuaded her to act in opposition to her conscience.

“She will need all her strength,” I thought sadly. “God forbid that she should reproach me in the future with

being the first that tempted her to defy her inward monitor."

We spoke no more until I surmised, from the thick curtain of smoke which even at that early hour obscured the brightness of the sky, that we were entering the outskirts of London. Then we agreed that it was time to awaken our companion; but before doing so I whispered to the girl.

"You see I have respected your scruples, I have not attempted to persuade you; but now let us consult your old friend here on the subject. If she sees no objection, I hope you will give me your address."

An expression of pleasure came into her eyes.

"Yes," she replied eagerly, "we will make her the judge. I hope she will think differently from the Lady Superior. She may, you know," she continued naively, "for she has seen you for herself, whereas the Lady Superior only spoke of people in general."

My heart warmed within me at her unconscious compliment, and at once I hastened to awaken her chaperone. But the old lady was so excited when she discovered our close proximity to the great city, and so full of reproaches that we had not awakened her sooner, that by a silent glance we agreed it was an unpropitious moment for seeking any cool advice from her.

Not until she was settled in the cab did she allow me a minutes' breathing time; but then she gave a great sigh of content, and said gratefully,

"I can never thank you enough, sir, for your great goodness."

"Don't mention it, pray," I replied politely, and seizing the opportunity, I continued, "You are so kind, madam, that I feel sure you will not consider me taking a liberty if I ask the favour of a little advice."

I lost no further time in stating my case. She listened with a shrewd, kindly look

on her plain old face, but when I had finished she shook her head.

“ I am sorry,” she responded gently, “ that I cannot say what you wish me to, but I really could not reconcile it to my conscience to do so. It would be a different thing if this young lady were going to remain under my care ; then, if I chose, I could take the responsibility of allowing you to resume your acquaintance with her. As it is, however, I am simply her chaperone for the journey. To-morrow she will leave my care.”

“ I am sorry to disappoint you,” she repeated, and then she stretched out her hand to me, saying heartily : “ Good bye, and don’t look so dismal ; one can’t have everything according to one’s wishes, you know. Good-bye ; I hope one day we shall meet again.”

I bowed, but I could not speak. I could not account for the intensity of my feelings, but it seemed to me as if I were about to lose something that had grown very dear to me.

The cabman had ascended to his seat and was gathering up the reins before I raised my downcast head, and saw that the old lady had retired from the window to make way for her young companion.

The girl's lips trembled, and her eyes were brimming over with tears.

"Good-bye, good-bye," she whispered, with a pathetic little tremor in her voice, "we can shake hands, at least. Heaven reward you for your kindness and sympathy."

In a sort of dream I pressed the small hand in mine, and then I watched the sweet sad face until I could see it no longer.

The cab drove slowly out of the station yard; but still I stood there staring blankly in the direction it had taken. At length I pulled myself together, and muttered almost fiercely.

"You are a fool, Friend Perditus. What has become of your brave confident spirit? Will you let a disappointment like this crush you? Come, rouse yourself, man; go about your own business, and cease to

worry yourself over what does not concern you."

But an argument with so intangible an opponent as an undefined sensation of disappointment always turns out very unsatisfactorily. Say what I might, it was impossible to convince myself that, with or without cause, I did not feel very unhappy, and at last I gave up the effort.

"It's no good," I muttered. "I feel as down as ever I can be. One thing, however, I am glad of, and that is that dear old Charlie is spared the sight of my dismal countenance. Let us hope I shall have shaken off this blue devil before he appears upon the scene again. I will do my best, at any rate."

With which laudable resolve I re-entered the busy station, and after some trouble discovering my trunk, hailed a hansom, and desired to be driven straight to the address with which Hall had supplied me.

CHAPTER VIII.

I HAD been in London for two days on the occasion that Hall and I revisited Lancashire for the purpose of recovering my diamonds, but that time we had put up at an hotel in the West End; now it was towards the Strand that I took my way.

I was driven briskly along the Embankment. It was still early, and the gardeners were busily engaged in sweeping up the fallen leaves, and making their green little domains trim and tidy for the day. But what interested me far more was the stream of well-dressed, spruce-looking men, which a natural law of gravitation seemed to be drawing eastwards.

At last it occurred to me that something

unusual must be going on in that direction ; and pushing open the little trap door in the roof of the cab, I inquired of the driver whether this was so.

“Not that I have heer’d on, sir, and I should have heer’d on it if there was anything special up,” he replied civilly.

“But these gentlemen are all going the same way ; we meet no one scarcely ; surely there must be some reason for it.”

“Lor bless your heart, no, sir. You are new to London, evidently. These are business gents, on their way to the City. On fine mornings lots of ’em comes up by train to Charing Cross, and then walks along the Embankment. A good blow off the river freshens them up wonderful.”

After this my interest in the pedestrians increased a hundred fold, indeed so keen was it that ere I reached my destination the melancholy spirit which had oppressed me in starting had almost disappeared. I had not forgotten my young friend, it is true, but I thought of her more hopefully. I

even felt a comfortable conviction in my mind that somehow or other we should meet again before very long.

Hall's friend, to whom I bore a letter of introduction, was a barrister, and lived in chambers in the Temple, up four flights of rather dark stairs. It was not ten o'clock when I knocked at his door, and he was still at breakfast, which however I did not regret as I was very glad of an opportunity of joining him.

Frank Nesbit was a jolly convivial fellow, with bright merry blue eyes and an extraordinarily bald head. He greeted me very warmly.

"I expected you," he said; "Charlie telegraphed to me last night. I waited breakfast until half-past nine, and then my inward ravennings growing beyond my control, I was obliged to satisfy them. Come, fall to, old fellow. Ha, ha! you are attracted are you by the brilliant polish on the top of my cranium? Oh don't look sheepish, man; I am used to it. It is a good thing I have

to wear a wig in court, or I should never be able to intimidate a reluctant witness with the power of my eye. Why, do you know," he added, with a fresh burst of laughter, "I never by any chance catch a person's eye in private life for more than a second. My friends make gallant efforts in this way, but as certain as possible, after a moment's struggle, they succumb; and I feel their orbs fixed upon the place where the wool ought to grow."

"I really must apologise," I stammered, in great confusion.

"No, pray don't," he cried, wringing my hand heartily; "I don't mind it in the least. I should do just the same if I were in your place. My head is a sort of standing joke between me and my intimates; and among them I hope I shall soon reckon you. Any friend of dear old Charlie Hall's must be a friend of mine too. By-the-by, did he not prepare you for my peculiarity?"

"No indeed," I answered, "he wilfully

misled me. He described you to me as a man with a shock of red hair."

Nesbit threw himself back in his chair, and laughed until the tears ran down his fresh ruddy cheeks. Ha, ha!" he shouted, "what a capital sell; no wonder you looked astonished. I must have been a surprise to you."

"It was rather too bad of him, though," I said, still somewhat discomfited; "I might so easily have offended you."

At this Nesbit broke into a fresh peal.

"You must excuse me, my dear boy," he gasped; "but your serious view of the case is so awfully funny. Hall has furnished me with a good laugh at any rate. Ha, ha! a shock of red hair! and I have been as bald as an egg for three years."

There was something very fascinating to me in this genuine appreciation of fun even when it was poked at himself, although I admit my own appreciation of humour is by no means of an acute order. Under the influence of his infectious mirth my gravity

gave way, and together we sat and laughed until we were exhausted.

Jolly, kindly Frank Nesbit! He has a tender heart, and a ready hand to help a friend; but his life is one long laugh. He will be a judge some day, and a good judge, too, for he is rising steadily in his profession; but even on the bench I am certain that he will laugh.

Charlie Hall knew his friend thoroughly, and before ten minutes had passed I began to suspect that his joke had had a rather deep origin. Looking back at this distance of time, I feel no doubt at all upon the subject. Charlie knew—who so well?—that my peculiar circumstances made me a very difficult person to get on with, therefore he had devised this little ruse to throw us both off our ordinary balance; and admirably it succeeded, for it is quite certain no other commencement could possibly have placed me so soon on a good footing with my genial host. Before we had concluded our meal he was regarding me quite affec-

tionately; and when we rose satisfied, he clapped me heartily on the shoulder.

"I shall remember our meeting for many a long day," he said, with a chuckle. "I must own I thoroughly enjoy a good laugh, and you've given me the best I have had since I left college."

"It was a comical idea," I said, trying vainly to perceive the full force of it.

"But, my dear fellow," he interrupted, "you hadn't half the fun out of it that I had. You couldn't see your own face. Oh, dear, you were really lovely—so shocked, so confused. Ha! ha! Oh, I say, this won't do. Let us be serious. I have some important business on to-day."

It was my first experience of being chaffed, and, although I was not quite certain that I liked it altogether, I was very glad, even at the expense of my own dignity, to have made so pleasant an impression.

We left the chambers together, and then Nesbit inquired how I should like to employ

myself—whether I would go straight to bed and rest after my journey at an adjacent hotel, where he had already secured a room for me, or whether I would turn in to the National Gallery for an hour or two? My hasty refusal of both propositions rather amused him.

“So you have had enough of madonnas and saints, eh?” he said, with a smile. “I thought I was quite safe in suggesting the National Gallery. How strange it is Hall always seems to chum with his opposites. Now we are the firmest of friends, but my appreciation of old masters is anything but what it should be. And as for him, he simply worships them. I am sorry, however, for once that the National Gallery doesn’t suit you, for I have my hands full to-day, morning and evening. If Charlie had given me longer notice I might have put off some of my business, but as it is I cannot.”

“Of course you cannot,” I replied hastily, feeling a little objectless myself. “I

wouldn't for the world interfere with any of your plans."

Lifting his hat, Frank Nesbit passed his hand impatiently over his smooth shining head, a habit of his, I soon perceived, when anything occurred to disturb his serenity.

"I should not care about to-night," he said; "you could go to a theatre or amuse yourself in a hundred different ways without me; but at this time in the morning there's the deuce of a difficulty in finding anything to do. If it wasn't for this infernal stockbroking business I could devote myself to taking you about a bit."

"Are you going on the Stock Eexchange?" I inquired eagerly.

"Why, not exactly;" he replied, raising his eyebrows in some surprise. "I am not one of the privileged fraternity, you know. I am simply going to call upon a broker who lives in Threadneedle Street. It's an awful bore to me; I hate figures of all kinds, but I have rather a difficult brief on hand, and I can't work it out without some particulars from this man."

“ I suppose——,” I said, and then I hesitated.

“ You suppose what, old fellow ? ”

“ I suppose you couldn’t possibly take me with you ? I should be in the way, shouldn’t I ? ”

“ Not the least in the world,” he answered readily ; “ but, my dear fellow, you can’t seriously mean you wish to go and sit in a stuffy little city office this glorious sunshiny day ? ”

“ Indeed, I do,” I answered earnestly. “ There’s nothing would give me so much pleasure.”

My companion, with an unconscious expression of amazement, made no further remark, but hailing a hansom followed me into it. In less than ten minutes we reached the narrow, dingy-looking street.

“ And do you mean to tell me,” I cried, “ that rich men conduct their business in such a place as this ? ”

“ I do indeed,” replied my conductor ; “ this gentleman I am going to see is worth hundreds of thousands of pounds. He is

one of the most lucky men on the Exchange—everything he takes in hand seems to prosper; however, I suppose a smash will come some day.”

Silently, but full of an intense interest, I followed my companion up half a dozen flights of dirty stone stairs; and then into a small, dingy, shabby-looking office with a dilapidated carpet and dirty windows.

“Only a Cræsus could afford to despise appearances to that extent,” whispered Nesbit, pointing to an enormous hole in the hearth-rug. “How the man can stand such wretched surroundings, living in such luxury as he does at home, I cannot imagine. I suppose it is that business is so exciting.”

“That is it,” I interrupted eagerly. “He is naturally so absorbed in what he is about that he does not notice trifles like this.”

“By George, Perditus!” Nesbit commenced, and then perceiving we were no longer alone he stopped abruptly.

The stockbroker, or to speak more correctly the stockjobber, Mr. Stanniwell, who had entered the room with a noisy bustle, was a handsome muscular-looking man, with an intelligent strongly-marked face, and keen piercing gray eyes, and was to me an object of the greatest admiration and interest.

Nesbit briefly introduced me, and then without an instant's pause plunged into his business. I listened intently; but beyond the fact that they were speaking of large monetary transactions I could understand nothing of what they said. Presently, however, they came to a question of figures. It was an intricate problem certainly, but it was perfectly clear to me from the first, and I could scarcely believe my senses when I saw Frank Nesbit throw himself back into his chair in hopeless perplexity, and heard Mr. Stanniwell himself declare that he was puzzled, and must call one of his clerks to his assistance.

Impulsively I rose.

“Let me help you,” I cried eagerly; and then before they could recover from their surprise I made the thing plain to them.

“By Jove!” cried Stanniwell, “you have a marvellously clear head. Why, you ought to be one of us.”

“I wish I was,” I said. “There is nothing I should like better.”

“You mean you desire to go in for a little speculating?” enquired the broker.

“Certainly I do.”

“And you have the means?”

“Why yes, I am very well off.”

“Come and see me to-morrow then,” said Mr. Stanniwell, “and we will have a little talk.”

Here Nesbit interrupted.

“I say, Perditus, take care what you are about.”

“Nonsense, Nesbit,” cried Stanniwell, clapping him on the back, “your friend is safe in my hands, you know that. Come, you ought to be the last to put a spoke in my wheel. Remember that fifty pounds

that I turned into two hundred and fifty pounds for you. You would not have been the thriving young barrister you are, but for that. How could you have lived those first two briefless years, my boy, if you hadn't trusted yourself to me?"

"That's true enough," Nesbit admitted reluctantly, "but at the same time I am bound to remember the agony of mind I suffered when I offered up my little nest-egg to you. Now a fellow like Perditus with thirty or forty thousand pounds to use ought to rest satisfied, I think. And if he takes my advice he will."

"But I am not content," I cried. "Thirty thousand pounds do not satisfy me; I want to make money; and besides, I long for some bustle and excitement. I am tired of this humdrum steady-going existence."

At this somewhat petulant outbreak on my part, Frank Nesbit's cheery face clouded over; but he offered no further advice, nor even when he heard me making an appoint-

ment for the morrow with the astute stock-broker did he to the extent of one word of expostulation interfere with the bent of my inclinations.

It was past one when we left Mr. Stanniwell's office, and quite time to be thinking of lunch, Nesbit declared, with an effort after his former jollity; but his attempts to be genial were quite in vain; an anxious air of perturbation clouded his frank open countenance, and frequently I observed him looking at me with a questioning expression in which disapproval and uncertainty were almost equally balanced.

Our luncheon was a very dismal affair, an oppressive air of constraint hung over both of us, which was all the heavier to me because I was fully aware that the evident embarrassment of my companion was the outcome of a sense of dissatisfaction with me, though from what cause this dissatisfaction arose I had not the faintest suspicion.

At length I could bear it no longer; in

many respects, despite my years and manly stalwart appearance, I was still very youthful in my feelings. I had almost a childish horror of blame and craving for the approbation of my associates, and as a child suffers intensely from causes which our maturer judgments teach us are very temporary troubles, and after all easy to live down, even so did I suffer to read distrust of myself in a face which before had beamed upon me in the truest spirit of confidence.

Leaning across the small table which separated us, I placed my hand upon his arm.

“Nesbit,” I said—I was so thoroughly depressed that I found it difficult to prevent my voice trembling—“Nesbit, what have I done? Why are you angry with me?”

“Angry, my dear fellow?” he stammered, very much disconcerted. “You are mistaken, Perditus; what right in the world have I to be angry with you?”

“I can’t tell you that,” I replied with a melancholy shrug of the shoulders, “but I

am not altogether a fool, and if you are not angry you are displeased, and if you are not displeased you are something equally uncomfortable. At any rate, since we left Mr. Stanniwell's office your manner has completely altered. Perhaps it would be better form and more like an ordinary man of the world to ignore this ; but I am not ordinary, would to heaven I were, and to offend you makes me miserable."

With a quick look of surprised sympathy he grasped my hand.

"Don't say another word, Perditus, you make me ashamed of myself ; you should not attach so much importance to trivial matters."

"But your good opinion is not a trivial matter to me," I urged. "Charlie Hall says there is no man in the world he respects more, and that he considers you an unerring judge of character."

"Oh, that's all nonsense," he continued quickly ; "everyone makes mistakes sometimes."

“And you find you were mistaken in me,” I rejoined sadly; “well, I am sorry for it, for I am sure you were prepared to like me at first, and, considering that I have only one friend in the wide world, the loss of your liking is an important matter to me.”

Rubbing his hand over his bald head, Frank Nesbit regarded me thoughtfully for a moment, and then his lips broke into their former sunny smile, and he wrung my hand hard.

“Bless my heart, Perditus,” he cried, “you may well say you are not ordinary. I shall be sorry for the girls when you are let loose in society, what with your persuasive voice and your appearance. Oh, you needn’t try to deny the soft impeachment; you haven’t lived with Charlie Hall for more than a year without hearing of that; the dear, ugly old boy has a perfect reverence for physical perfections. Well, being the only admirable quality that he lacks himself, I suppose that is not unnatural.”

“I assure you, Perditus,” he continued, chuckling, “it was quite a relief to me when I saw you. You are a good looking chap, I won’t deny it ; but you are not quite so utterly too too as I expected, and I am glad of it. If you had entirely answered Charlie’s description, London would have been crowded with love-lorn maidens.”

Rising, I stretched myself wearily ; this subject was not an interesting one to me.

“I don’t care for women,” I said, “I know little or nothing of them.”

“Ah, well, that won’t be the case long,” he replied merrily. “Come, Perditus, confess ; you have been the grand tour, and you mean to say you have not seen a woman that you admire ? ”

“I have not,” I answered carelessly.

“What, never ? ” he went on with mock intensity.

“No, never ! ” I answered with slight impatience, and then of a sudden there came into my mind the fair, gentle, melancholy face of the young girl with whom I

had journeyed to London. I had admired her, there was no doubt of that, but my admiration for her had been of quite another description from that suggested by Frank Nesbit. She had interested me intensely, and I felt an almost yearning sense of affinity with her, but I was conscious of no other sentiment, and therefore I was vexed with myself when I felt my heart begin to palpitate and my face to flush under Nesbit's laughing scrutiny.

"Oh, I see," he said with a renewed chuckle; "it's a case of 'hardly ever.'" At the time I had not the faintest idea what he meant by this; but a few nights later I recognised his "what, never?" and "hardly ever," as catch words in a popular comic opera. "Well, Perditus, I am not your father confessor, I am quite satisfied now, and more sorry than ever for the English beauties. Thirty thousand pounds, good looks, and youth; it's hard on them. By-the-bye," he continued, with a quick change from raillery to anxious interest, "that brings us

back to our original topic of conversation. After all, I will tell you, Perditus, what it was I had in my mind about you."

"Aye, do," I answered eagerly; "I knew there was something."

"Well then, I was disappointed to find you were a fellow that thought so much of money. From what Hall has written of you I expected something altogether different, and to tell you the honest truth I think that a man who is so well provided as you are, ought to leave that sordid interest in life to others. You have enough to live on happily yourself, and to make others happy. Look at it as you will, Perditus, money-making is not an elevating pursuit."

An uneasy sense that he was right began to creep over me, but I dared not listen to him; the idea of a life empty of occupation or filled only with the little fads which suffice to interest a less restless disposition was insupportable to me.

"For heaven's sake, Nesbit," I cried,

“don’t try to argue with me on this matter. You may be right, indeed I have a miserable conviction upon me that you are, but I dare not follow your advice. I am not so narrow and so sordid as you think, but unless I can forget myself and my wretched condition I shall go mad. I am not as other men, remember that; ordinary arguments do not apply to my unhappy case. Your mind is full of father and mother, sisters and brothers, wife and children; with such loving thoughts sordid cares jar and clash; but I am alone, and until this new hope of money-making was instilled into my mind two days ago, the burden of my own personality was growing so heavy that it threatened to crush me altogether. If there was but one loving memory in my empty heart, it would be different.”

Frank Nesbit’s kindly eyes grew almost tender with the force of his sympathy, but after a momentary silence he rose and clapped me reassuringly on the back.

“I have done you an injustice,” he said;

“don’t punish me by appearing to recollect it. Cheer up, Perditus, your life will be a happy one yet. New interests and new affections will find their way into that empty heart of yours, take my word for it. Meanwhile, old fellow, just one more word of advice, and then I drop the subject for ever. Don’t do anything important with Stanniwell until Charlie joins you, at any rate. Fight shy of him.”

“I must go to-morrow; I have made an appointment.” I said,

“Well, don’t take any steps without considering the matter in all its bearings, that’s all. Now I am afraid I must leave you. What will you do with yourself?”

“I don’t know,” I replied, as we strolled together out of the restaurant. “Wander about the streets, I think, for a few hours. This bustling spirit of commerce has a tremendous attraction for me. Then in the evening I will go to one of the theatres.”

“Ah, yes, that’s a good idea,” assented Nesbit. “Which will you go to?”

“I have no choice,” I answered; “they are all equally new to me. I will be guided by the posters. Come, let us examine that hoarding over there.”

At once I made my selection.

In the centre of the hoarding was a highly-coloured picture representing a most sensational scene of murder. It was strange that I should have selected this form of entertainment, my inclination, as a rule, being to avoid everything with a gloomy tendency; but the instant my eye fell upon this picture and the name of the actress which was attached to it, I felt an absorbing desire to witness the piece, nor did all Frank Nesbit's laughing expostulations move me one jot from my purpose.

“But, my dear fellow,” he cried, “‘The Hand of Death’—a lively title, I am ready to admit—is at the ‘Standard,’ anything but a fashionable resort, right away at the East End, an awful place to find. You'll get lost to a certainty.”

“Nonsense!” I replied stoutly. “I can

take a cab when it's all over. Besides, I should like to get a glimpse of the East End. I have much more sympathy with the working man, I can tell you, than I have with the fashionable loungers I should come in contact with at one of the West End houses. I mean to be a worker myself, and 'honest labour wears a lovely face,' to quote one of dear old Charlie's favourite poems."

Frank Nesbit smiled good-humouredly.

"Don't let your enthusiasm mislead you, old fellow," he said kindly. "Take my word for it, Perditus, fustian and dirty faces are not always symbolical of labour. However, I won't attempt to lead your steps in another direction; the 'Standard' is about the finest theatre in London from a structural point of view, and they often get good actors there, though for the 'world-renowned actress, Miss Cronin,' I cannot vouch."

"Have you ever heard of her before?" I asked eagerly.

“Yes, I seem to have a dim recollection of her, but it must be many years ago since I saw her. I believe she was the rage for one or two seasons some fifteen or twenty years since, but that was before my theatre-going time.”

Here he pulled out his watch, and, with a hasty exclamation of dismay, hailed a hansom, and calling out to me to come round to his chambers after the theatre, and that he should sit up for me, was driven rapidly off in a western direction.

CHAPTER IX.

RESTLESSLY I paced the streets after Nesbit left me, looking at my watch every quarter of an hour, and on each occasion wondering at the slow progress of time.

Is it possible that old father Time never plays us tricks? I must confess it is a matter of speculation with me as to whether the popular belief in his reliable consistency is entirely deserved. I am quite aware that to express any positive doubts of this inexorable potentate would bring one's reasoning qualities under the gravest suspicion, so I will not do so. I am content to ask of any man or woman in this world, whether it is credible that the thirty seconds during which you endure the misery of the pho-

tographer's lens, or the two minutes of positive agony which the pitch darkness of a railway tunnel inflicts on many, myself among the number, can really be of no longer duration than the same period spent, we will say, in bidding farewell to the object of one's tenderest affections.

Be this as it may, one fact is quite certain, —and that is that that particular afternoon was the most tedious I ever experienced.

I could not exactly explain the meaning of my restlessness even to myself, at least when I say I could not I mean I would not. I would not allow myself to dwell upon the real cause of my intense longing for the evening to arrive, and I kept my ears shut resolutely against a little voice that seemed to whisper into them. But now I know that my absorbing anxiety arose from the fact that the name of Miss Cronin had stirred some sort of fibre within me which I could not account for.

I tried my utmost to occupy my thoughts in other directions, but I could not. This

one persistent name seemed to ring through my brain in regular cadences, and to deaden the sound of the traffic and multitudinous noises by which I was surrounded. At length my head positively began to ache with the effort of trying not to think and recollect.

I arrived at the Standard Theatre ten minutes before the doors were opened, and occupied myself in earnestly scrutinising a variety of portraits of Miss Cronin in all sorts of costumes, private and theatrical, which were displayed in the approaches to the box office; but although I studied every feature with the utmost attention, my investigations brought me no satisfaction, the face was absolutely unfamiliar to me; and as I recognised this fact a cruel sense of disappointment and depression came over me.

With a sigh I turned away, and thoroughly out of heart I was preparing to leave the building, when the great door, which admitted to the stalls and better-priced parts

of the house, suddenly opened with a noisy clang, and I was pushed over the threshold by about a score of young men and women, who appeared determined not to lose one minute of their money's worth.

“After all,” I thought gloomily, “I may as well go in—I have nothing better to do. Ah, dear me, I wish next week were here, and Charlie in London.”

The sight of the great house, however, with its enormous crowded pit and galleries, cheered my spirits somewhat. Good humour and merriment reigned on every side, and these sentiments having an infectious quality, soon, despite myself, I became much amused and interested by my immediate neighbours, who were evidently shopmen and women of the poorer sort—youths and maidens, with pale careworn faces—but who this evening were radiant with smiles and bent upon enjoyment.

My heart grew quite tender as I witnessed the intense anticipation of pleasure which pervaded the entire persons of these young

people, flushing the wan cheeks of the girls and brightening the eyes of the lads. At last my sympathy betrayed me into an act of unconventionality which nearly brought me into trouble.

Just before the rising of the curtain an attendant from the refreshment bar came pushing his way noisily along the seats, soliciting orders for various kinds of drinks, and carrying a tray in his hand on which were displayed a number of small brightly coloured bonbon boxes.

Oh, the appreciative longing glances that the girls cast at these little boxes, and how bravely they denied themselves the pleasure of possessing them for fear of levying too severe a tax on their sweethearts' scanty purses.

For some little time I watched one after another refusing what they evidently desired so strongly, and then I saw a flashily-dressed youth, apparently better off than his neighbours if one might judge by outward appearances, buy a box of sweet-

meats and bestow it upon the girl by his side.

Without a moment's consideration I rose to my feet, and beckoning to the man purchased the remainder of his trayful, ten boxes in all; so long as one was no better off than the others I could stand it, and could admire the cheerful spirit which so willingly gave up a pleasure for the sake of another, but I could not witness the fortunate girls' proud superior glance around, nor the wistful mortification of the others, and preserve my composure. After all it was such a pitiful sum that was needed to make them completely happy.

Throwing the money on to the tray I clutched the boxes, and then, with a murmured apology, I quickly distributed them to the ten girls nearest me, and sat down again.

At once I perceived my mistake; a hubbub of angry male voices arose around me, and to my intense discomfiture my obnoxious gifts came showering back into my lap.

In sympathy with their irate wooers, even the girls looked indignant, while a chorus of jeering laughter from the galleries above, whose occupants could see plainly all that had occurred, disconcerted me still further.

For a minute or so I sat motionless, listening to the uncomplimentary epithets that were being heaped upon me. I could not find it in my heart to be angry with them. After all, though I meant well, my action had been very ill-judged; looked at from their point of view, I had been, to quote one of the malcontents, "deucedly impertinent," and furthermore I could not restrain a feeling of respect for these poor weakly youths whose pride rose so hotly at anything they thought savoured of patronage or charity.

"Gentlemen," I cried at last, starting to my feet again and hugging the wretched boxes to me in a very undignified manner. "I am awfully sorry to have vexed you, really, I did not intend any rudeness."

“Then whatever did you do it for?”

“Why,” I said, desperately racking my brain for some tolerably plausible sounding reason, “I thought the waiter looked cut up at selling no more of his wares. So I bought them on an impulse, having more money than brains, you will think. Well, when I had got them I didn’t know what to do with them, and I don’t now. I really should take it as a favour if you would allow the young ladies to accept them.”

There was a muttered consultation between two or three of the men, and then one immediately behind me said sulkily—

“Well, sir, since you’ve apologised we don’t want to show no malice, so you can hand the boxes over, if you like.”

Thankful I was to get rid of them, but I was not pleased that the re-distribution of the little packets should be made the signal for a burst of ironical applause from the gallery boys; it was some consolation to me, however, to observe, very cautiously and furtively out of the corners of my eyes, how

eagerly the girls seized upon their recovered treasures, and with what keen appreciation they tore them open and settled down at once to the joy of nibbling their contents.

The ironical cheers from the gallery were still ringing unpleasantly in my ears, when, with the completion of the overture, to which I paid no attention, there came a sudden cry of "Order!" There was a general settling down and removal of hats, and then the curtain rose on the first scene of "The Hand of Death."

At the commencement the roughness and coarseness of the acting, and the meanness of the stage appointments, rather disgusted me. My experience of theatres at this time had been confined to the "Theatre Français," the "Vaudeville," and the "Gymnase" in Paris, and the difference between the cultured elegance of one class of entertainment and the noise and bluster of the other was very conspicuous, but with the entry of Miss Cronin my sentiments entirely altered.

This lady may not be a refined or possibly artistic actress from an educated point of view, but she is strong and vigorous and intensely human. On thinking the matter over afterwards, I came to the conclusion that the play was a very poor one judged critically, full of absurdities and clap-trap morality; but from the moment Miss Cronin stepped upon the stage there was not a more absorbed and sympathetic spectator than myself in the whole of the crowded house. Immediately I forgot the renewed sensation of disappointment which had come across me when the first glimpse at her sensitive though rather plain face convinced me that she was indeed an utter stranger to me. I forgot my surroundings; I forgot everything but the trials and dangers of this most natural and unstagey heroine.

Nor was my condition of enthusiastic interest at all a singular one, for if by any chance my eye wandered from the stage and the central figure on it, I saw that the

men and women round me were in a similar state of breathless excitement ; and I doubt if any one differently situated can form an adequate notion of the positive delight it was to me to recognise the fact that for the first time in my life, so far as I knew, my feelings were in perfect sympathy with those around me.

My heart swelled in my bosom ; I was not lonely now ; inwardly I seemed to claim a relationship with the youths and girls who surrounded me ; they were no longer plebeian in my eyes, they were my brothers and sisters ; I enjoyed as they enjoyed, neither more nor less ; I trembled and caught my breath as they trembled when some disaster threatened the woman upon whose words we all hung, and I cheered as they cheered when virtue gained a temporary advantage over vice.

I am quite aware that in describing my sensations on this occasion I run the risk of seeming ungrateful to my best friend, Charlie Hall, but so long as he does not mistake me I am satisfied. He knows as

well as I do that if he had been at the "Standard Theatre" that evening he would not have been heart and soul with me and my poor young brothers and sisters. I would not for the world do him so much injustice as to associate even the smallest amount of blaséness with his educated power of enjoying whatever is highest and noblest in art, but he is far more cultured and far more critical than I am even now, and six years ago the difference between us was even more strongly marked.

If he had been by my side that evening I frankly confess my enjoyment would have been considerably curtailed. He would have seen the weak points of the play at once; he could not have failed to do so, and he would probably have pointed them out to me in a good-natured spirit of kindly banter, and if he had refrained from doing this, I know he would have sat and watched me with a most benevolent smile of amusement at my finding any pleasure in what appeared to him such flagrant absurdities.

One thing is quite certain, if he had been there what follows would never have happened, for under the restraining influence of his presence, and only partially-concealed contempt for the whole thing, I could never have lost myself as I did.

From act to act the absorbing interest of the play grew stronger and stronger until, at the end of the fourth act, the position of the heroine became one of desperate and blood-curdling danger.

The stage is dark and mysterious. On a sofa in the centre lies the heroine in an exhausted slumber, worn out by watching and weeping. Presently the large windows at the back are seen to shake, and then a shadowy form enters and creeps—creeps—creeps—slowly towards the unconscious woman. As the figure approaches the head of the sofa it comes within the circle of light cast by a lamp which stands on a table near. Then a shudder runs through the crowded theatre, for we recognise in the ghastly shape a mysterious and awful one—

handed Hindoo mute, whose life is forfeited to some horrible religious institution unless he offers up a victim on a particular date each year.

Stealthily the creature raises the "Hand of death," with the pointed, glistening dagger in it, over the slumbering form. And then it hesitates a moment, and in the breathless silence that ensues I distinctly hear a young girl near me murmur to herself—

"Oh, oh, oh! Wake, wake! he will kill you! Oh, if she'd only wake!"

But she does not wake, and, after a furtive look around, the Hindoo steals to the back of the sofa, and lifting his wicked face tries in vain to articulate, giving vent to the most horrible and unearthly sounds. Then he elevates his murderous hand once more, and this time it comes down—comes down swiftly and surely upon the unprotected breast of the woman before him. There is a muffled shriek, and a confused struggle; and during the descent of the act drop

we see dimly a white heap lying upon the floor, and in the moonlight at the back the figure of the Hindoo, with the "Hand of death" clutching the dagger, still raised triumphantly on high.

A groan went up from the very heart of the attentive throng, and at the sound a wild almost frenzied condition of excitement seemed to seize upon me. Again the curtain that shadowed my past had been raised for one brief moment, and my brain began to work and seeth in the most bewildering fashion, as it had done once before over the mathematical problem in Winchester.

That groan wrung from the sympathetic audience awoke an echo within me. Perfectly beside myself, I sprang to my feet.

"She is not dead! she is not dead!" I cried; "the dagger has only scratched her, and was not poisoned. Her lover stole the poisoned one from the Hindoo, and put his own in its stead. Wipe your eyes, wipe your eyes, girls! I tell you it will all come right. I have seen the play before—I recol-

lect it distinctly now. Oh, thank God for it, —I remember—I remember ! ”

Then, snatching up my hat, I pushed my way through the crowd of angry **men** and women, heedless of the indignant protests for having spoiled the remainder of the play, which rose from every side. I was not thinking of them now, my one purpose in life was to gain admittance to Miss Cronin, and learn when and where she had played the piece before.

On the play bill it was stated that the play was an original one, and produced in England for the first time that evening ; but I knew that I had seen it before, and also that a lady calling herself Miss Cronin had enacted the heroine on the previous occasion. I could not recollect, however, that the two ladies bore any resemblance to each other, but I was aware how very different actresses look under altered circumstances.

Running through the passages, the sound of the disorderly tumult which my most unexpected and irritating explanations had

occasioned still ringing in my ears, in a minute I reached the entrance hall. As I entered, my cheeks no doubt flushed, and my eyes glittering with excitement, a gentleman emerged from the little box office and locked the door after him. His eyes fell upon me, and I saw a look of quick suspicion come into his face, as the muffled noise of a disorderly distant crowd struck upon his ears.

Laying his hand tightly upon my arm, he pulled me unceremoniously to the foot of the stairs.

“Here, you just wait a minute, if you please,” he said sternly, “till I hear what this row’s about. The piece was going as smoothly as possible five minutes ago.”

“It’s my fault,” I cried, “it’s my fault, they are angry with me, but I meant no harm. I spoke on an impulse.”

Here, in answer to a shout from my companion, one of the theatre attendants was seen hurrying down the stairs, a broad grin on his shining hot face. Evidently

re-assured by the man's appearance, the gentleman loosened his hold of my arm.

"Why, Jones," he said, "what's the meaning of this disturbance?"

"Oh, nothing to hurt," Jones replied with a laugh. "A gent in the stalls, who had had a drop to drink, I should say, has been putting the people out of temper all the evening."

"How?"

"Why, first he goes and buys sweets and gives it to the fellows' girls, and then he jumps up and makes a speech, and lets the cat out of the bag about the poisoned dagger that brings the curtain down on the big sensation scene. The lads are simply furious; it's a good thing for that there swell that he was a strong heavily-built chap, or else he'd have been roughly handled."

At this moment the man's eyes encountered mine; with a look of almost comic bewilderment he stared at me.

"Why, sir, it was you," he exclaimed.

“Whatever in the world made you do it? You don’t look as if you’d been on the spree.”

“Nor have I,” I said earnestly. “I can’t attempt to explain what I did, but I am sorry to have been the cause of any disturbance. Can I make any possible compensation?”

“No, no; none at all,” hastily interrupted the gentleman, who I afterwards found was the treasurer of the theatre; “there’s no harm done after all. I’ll go up and quiet them in a minute.”

“But, sir,” I cried, as he ran rapidly up the stairs——

Waving me off, he continued——

“I am sorry, my dear sir, I have not a minute to spare. I have a train to catch; good evening.”

And with that he disappeared.

Turning to Jones, who still stood regarding me with an air of great curiosity, I put a sovereign into his hand.

“Mr. Jones,” I said persuasively, “will you do me a favour?”

He looked from the coin to my eager face, and then back again to the piece of gold. Apparently the aspect of that, at any rate, was agreeable to him, for the startled expression which his unexpected recognition of me had called into existence, faded out of his countenance, and he replied pleasantly enough, after pocketing the money,

“I’ll do anything I can for you, sir.”

“Well, then,” I said, forcing myself to speak calmly, lest I should again arouse his distrust. “I want to see Miss Cronin for five minutes? How can I manage it?”

The man shook his head.

“I am sorry, sir, but I can’t help you to that; no one’s allowed behind the scenes. Unless, indeed, you are a friend of Miss Cronin’s, then I dare say they would let you through.”

“I am not a friend of hers,” I replied,

“but I absolutely must see her for a minute or two.”

In my painful anxiety I took from my pocket book a five pound note, and showed it to the astonished man.

“I only want to ask the lady a question,” I continued imploringly; “but it is a question of vital importance to me. Go to her, tell her this: say I will wait upon her thankfully any time she may appoint, and whether she grants my request or not this bank note shall be yours.”

But Jones was evidently a good hearted, not over-grasping man; motioning me to put away my money, he beckoned to me to follow him.

“I’ll do my best for you, sir, but you’ve paid me quite enough already. Come along quick, we may catch Miss Cronin’s husband at the stage door. The piece is nearly over, the last act only plays ten minutes.”

Without another word I hastened after him, my blood boiling in my veins, and my spirits unreasonably elated. I had no fear

of being denied access to Miss Cronin's presence, and when I had learnt from her where it was that I previously witnessed the play, I had no doubt but that a host of long-forgotten memories would crowd upon me, and that the thick dense veil which hung over my past would be rent, letting in upon the darkness of my soul a flood of glorious light.

At the stage door we encountered a tall, dark, middle-aged man, with a handsome bearded face, and very stooping shoulders; this, Jones whispered to me, was Mr. Vincent, husband of the lady I sought, who still used her maiden name for professional purposes.

At once I accosted Mr. Vincent. He listened politely to my request, though I could see that my eager and excited manner very much astonished him. When I had finished he looked deprecatingly at me.

"I am sorry," he said, "I don't wish to be disobliging, but my wife makes a rule of not seeing strangers. I assure you such a rule is necessary in her profession."

“ I have no doubt of it,” I replied quickly, “ but if she would make an exception in my favour I should be eternally grateful to her. I only want to ask her a simple question, it will cost her nothing, absolutely nothing to answer it, and by doing so she may change the entire complexion of a very unfortunate and unhappy existence.”

My increased earnestness evidently impressed him, but still he hesitated.

“ If it is only a question, cannot I answer you as well as my wife ? ”

At once I recognised the reason of this.

“ I never thought of that,” I cried, “ no doubt you can.”

And then laying my hand on his arm in my impatient eagerness, I asked him the question upon which I felt my very fate depended. My heart sank as a look of vexation crossed his attentive face. He considered a moment, and then he said hastily—

“ After all you must see my wife, I can’t answer you ; we have only been married two years, and during that time she has not

played this piece ; what she did before that I don't know. Follow me and walk softly, the curtain is not down yet, and the sound of footsteps behind the scenes worry my wife."

Picking my way as carefully as I could among a confusion of spare canvas scenes, furniture, and indiarubber gas tubing ; with an occasional stumble at length I reached the door of a good-sized dressing-room, which was evidently close to the stage, as, although the scene prevented my seeing the actors, I could hear their voices distinctly.

"My wife will be here in a minute," whispered Mr. Vincent, who had glided before me with the noiseless movements of a ghost. "We had better not talk now, her hearing is most remarkably acute, and being unusually enthusiastic she is easily upset."

Heaven knows I had no desire for conversation, but even in my condition of deep preoccupation, and fierce feverish expectation, the thought flitted across my

excited brain,—Would the end of another two years of married life see Mr. Vincent quite so much the willing slave to “my wife’s” fancies? At the present moment he seemed to have sunk his individuality entirely in hers.

Five minutes I waited, and then I heard a rustling ominous sound, which Mr. Vincent explained was the curtain descending. A heavy thud upon the stage followed, and a very faint clapping of hands from the distant audience. Mr. Vincent’s pale race flushed with annoyance.

“No call,” he said, turning his dismayed face to me with an evident appeal for sympathy.

I had not the remotest idea what he meant.

“No call?” I repeated.

“No call before the curtain,” he replied testily. “The piece has fallen flat after all, and my wife will feel it deeply. She is not used to failure; I know it will depress her.”

He hurried out of the room, but the next minute proved to me that his fears on her account had been quite fallacious. I heard a pleasant laugh, and Miss Cronin's voice.

"Why, George," she cried, "what's the matter? You look the picture of woe."

"There was no call," he faltered.

"Well, what of it?" she replied cheerily. "The piece went splendidly up to the end of the fourth act; and we've always known the last is rubbish. Besides that, the jovial gentleman in the stalls put the people out of temper. By-the-bye, did you see him? He didn't look at all 'on' I must admit. I peeped through the hole in the curtain when I heard him speaking. I never saw a more—— Why, George, *what is* the matter with you?"

I could not distinguish his reply, but I heard a little smothered exclamation from her lips of——

"Good gracious, why didn't you say so before? Who is it?"

“I don’t know ; someone who has been in front, I suppose.”

A quick step or two, and then the half-closed door was thrown open and Miss Cronin entered, followed by her devoted husband. At once a comic look of bewilderment came into her clever kindly face.

“I know,” I cried, “I could not help hearing what you said just now. I am very sorry, madam, I apologise to you from my heart. But I could not help myself; the force of my feelings carried me away.”

“Oh, don’t distress yourself,” she said, looking at me with a very sweet womanly smile. “To tell you the truth, little incidents of this kind vary what is, after all, rather a monotonous life. I am really proud to have excited you so much. I was always sure there was real heart in this play, poor though it is from a literary point of view, and you have strengthened that conviction.”

I could see she continued speaking with the good-natured desire of relieving my

evident embarrassment, but seeing that I still continued silent, for indeed, now that it had come to the point, I felt a strange difficulty in approaching the subject—she seated herself on a large wicker dress basket, and motioning me to take a chair said—

“And this question, what is it, sir?”

Her genial kindness restored my confidence, and without any further hesitation I told her what I wanted to know, concealing from her of course the real cause of my anxiety, which, however, I stated was very important.

For half an hour we talked, and then, utterly dejected and cast down, I rose to take my leave.

Miss Cronin had only made my miserable mental confusion more complete.

Ever since my momentary flash of remembrance at Winchester, I had clung to the idea that my youth had been passed in India. It is true I had only the slightest possible foundation for such a belief, but

seeing that I took some faint comfort from this notion—for in my peculiar and unhappy circumstances to feel that I had the smallest claim on any country seemed to make me one degree less forlorn—Charlie Hall had encouraged me in it. Now, therefore, to hear from Miss Cronin that she had played this piece in Australia, New Zealand, America, and even in Africa, but not in any part of India, was a terrible blow to me.

“I am very sorry,” she said, in tones of such genuine womanly sympathy that the hot tears rushed to my feverish eyes; “I am very very sorry not to have been of assistance to you. Of course I don’t know your trouble, nor do I wish to; believe me, I am not curious; but it grieves me always to see young people sorrowful; my youth was such a very happy one.”

I shook her outstretched hand, but I could not speak.

“And you are quite sure that it was this piece you saw on the previous occasion?”

she asked, holding my hand for a moment. "You say that your knowledge of plays is limited; mine, on the other hand, is most extensive, and I can tell you that there is a very remarkable family likeness in sensational melodramas of this class."

"Ah, there may be," I said mournfully; "but I am quite certain about this; I remember the one-handed Indian mute distinctly."

"That is curious," she murmured, "for I really do believe the one-handed Indian mute is unique. And this play, then, is exactly the same as the one you fancy you saw in India?"

"Yes, the play is identical, and the name of the lady who took the heroine's part was Miss Cronin, therefore it must have been you, I suppose?"

"Certainly it must. I am the only actress of that name; besides the play is my property, no one else can perform it. But I suppose you recognise me, as you remember the rest so well."

“No,” I said, “and that puzzled me a good deal at first, until I remembered the power actresses possess of changing their appearance. You seem to me to have altered entirely since I saw you play before.”

Her strongly marked black brows raised themselves in surprise.

“That is very strange !” she exclaimed ; “the piece has only been in existence for five years. At my age five years makes very little difference, especially on the stage.”

“But your hair is completely different,” I said.

She looked at me with an expression of the greatest perplexity.

“I can’t understand it,” she murmured, “my hair is exactly the same as it was twenty years ago.”

“Then you must have worn a wig,” I persisted.

“No,” she replied, with some slight show of natural irritation, her own glossy auburn

hair being in truth very beautiful. "I never wear wigs ; I detest them."

"Well, I only know," I continued hopelessly, "that the Miss Cronin who played when I saw this piece before, had flaxen hair, and very light eyebrows too. I noticed this particularly, because all the other ladies looked so very black beside her."

With an excited exclamation, Miss Cronin clapped her hands together.

"Why didn't you tell me that long ago?" she cried ; "now I can unravel the mystery. I thought I understood from you that you had not been to Africa, but that was a mistake, of course.

"Africa !" I stammered.

"Yes, Africa. I was ill for two nights two years ago, during an engagement in Cape Town, and my under-study had to play the part. She was a very fair girl, and a very good actress, too."

"Cape Town?" I repeated blankly.

"Yes, Cape Town. I am quite certain of it," she continued ; "I can even tell you

the exact dates—the 30th and 31st of December, 1879. I never disappointed the public before or since, and I remember being superstitiously afraid of beginning the new year badly; however, I was able to resume my part on January 1st, 1880, and as I was only out of the bill two nights no alteration was made in the programmes.”

And this was all the satisfaction I gained from my interview with Miss Cronin.

I did not explain the cause of my accession of depression to Frank Nesbit when I returned to his chambers, but I declined the proffered cigar, and, saying that I was tired out, betook myself to my hotel. I could not sleep, however, and when I rose the next morning and started to walk to Mr. Stanniwell's I felt so utterly miserable that I muttered to myself—

“I wish to goodness Nesbit had not instilled his cautious advice into my mind yesterday. I must change the current of

my thoughts somehow, and just now I can think of no other way than this."

Entering Mr. Stanniwell's office in this frame of mind, it need surprise no one that his arguments speedily overcame my scruples. I wished to be convinced by him, and therefore it was no difficult matter to persuade me to let him purchase a few shares for me in a new company that, according to his ideas, was bound to be a success.

I concealed this transaction from Frank Nesbit, who evidently took it for granted I had followed his advice, and by the time Charlie Hall returned, having, after rather an unexpected delay, effected the sale of the rest of my diamonds, for the very considerable sum of thirty-eight thousand pounds, there was not a more absorbed or reckless speculator than I in the whole of England.

CHAPTER X.

THE following three years of my life I cannot think of without a bitter pang of self-reproach and pain, and I will hurry over the record of them, knowing full well that if the remembrance of that period fills me with shame, I cannot expect from others even as much indulgence as I extend towards myself.

The fever of money-making held me in its iron grasp. From morning till night I thought of nothing else ; and so astoundingly lucky was I in all my transactions, that soon I became quite a celebrated man among speculators and floaters of companies. My name attached to any new scheme assured the shares a ready sale,

and before the end of the three years my thirty thousand pounds had become more than two hundred thousand.

My wealth made no difference in my manner of living, however; I had no expensive tastes; my share in Charlie Hall's house in Wilton Crescent, Knightsbridge, quite satisfied me; and the money that I was not using in fresh speculations I deposited in the bank and never thought of again.

Fortunately for me, my good genius, my dear, staunch friend, was true to me throughout this dark degrading epoch of my existence, and it is a slight, a very slight, consolation to me to remember that, through Charlie Hall, my money was of some little benefit to others.

I gave really large sums away in charity; but my cheeks would burn with honest shame when my munificence was made the subject of remark. I knew so well, that but for Charlie such and such an institution might have closed its doors for want of funds,

and the sick and needy have been sent sorrowful away. In the midst of the fierce fever that was consuming me, I had no time to think of the poor and their wants, and the blessings I received from those I had unwittingly benefited weighed upon my spirits with so terrible a sense of mortification and unworthiness, that at length, roused out of myself, I cried despairingly—

“Oh, Charlie, Charlie, for God’s sake don’t tell me what they say. You know I do not deserve their praise; don’t humble me to the dust, if you still retain one spark of love for me. But for you these children might have ended their days in the midst of squalor and vice. I am a money-making machine; I have no heart, no pity, no sympathy; the cries of the widow and the orphan, the hungry and the homeless, would never touch me but for you. Oh, my friend, I am frightened of myself; I am the slave of a demon whose dominion over me is absolute. Charlie, for heaven’s sake don’t let me wear out your marvellous patience.

Help me to do some little good with this horrible money, which I crave for, but which lies so heavily on my soul that it threatens to crush me altogether."

Charlie Hall stretched out his hand and grasped mine kindly.

"Don't judge yourself so harshly, Friend," he said soothingly. "There is a nightmare upon you, dear old boy; one morning you will wake and find it gone."

But weeks, months, years passed by, and the fever increased instead of diminished.

During our first year in Wilton Crescent, while Charlie's time was still very sparsely occupied, we went out a good deal into society; but balls and musical at-homes afforded me no pleasure at all, and I soon found my absorbing business cares interfere with what was at first a genuine delight to me—theatrical entertainments of all kinds.

As time went on, however, Charlie's great talents and enthusiastic devotion to his profession, met with richly-deserved apprecia-

tion. His leisure for social enjoyments diminished as his fortune grew, and I made this an excuse for absenting myself from scenes which had never possessed any attractions for me, though, it must be confessed, society received me more kindly, and lavished far more attention upon me, than I merited in any way.

But one place there was in which for a time I found great consolation. This was the house of Frank Nesbit, who quickly forgave me my neglect of his caution in the matter of Mr. Stanniwell.

Frank Nesbit's home was a roomy old-fashioned house near Hampstead Heath, with a large rambling garden, in which all sorts of most unfashionable flowers, roses, sweet williams, stocks, and mignonette, ran wild in the rankest luxuriance. Lawn-tennis Frank would have none of, but there was a green alley for bowls, and a capital gymnasium for his two sturdy little boys, against the time they grew old enough to emulate the wonderful evolutions of their

idolised father, whom they would watch with wide-open eyes of infantile adoration.

Considering that it was such a very happy one, Nesbit's was a curious *mérage* altogether. His mother, his sister, and a young brother who was just entering the hospitals, resided with him; and whether it was that his sweet little wife was as good-tempered as he, and his mother and sister equally so, I cannot tell, but certain it is that they all lived together as happily as birds in a nest are supposed to do.

At first, as I say, this peaceful haven was an inestimable boon to me; to sit in the cool shade of those ample trees, listening to the twitter of the birds, and breathing the perfume of the homely flowers, after the sordid excitement of the day, was the sweetest solace and consolation.

But presently a fresh trouble assailed me. At Frank Nesbit's, people did just what they liked, talked or sat silent, according to the bent of their wishes, and I soon found that I had too much time to think when I went

there—to think of myself and my impenetrable past, for strangely enough the anxieties of my business never followed me into this calm happy home.

Something else there was, too, which I concealed at the time, but which now I do not hesitate to confess. I was unhappily, painfully jealous. I had monopolised Charlie Hall's affection and care so entirely at one time, that his evident admiration for Frank's pretty sister Julia, seemed to overwhelm me with a sense of positive personal injury.

Nor was I jealous only; I was envious, too; not of Charlie's sweetheart—Heaven forbid! even at that time I would not have deprived him of his treasure for all the riches of the world—but I envied Frank the love of wife and children, and more than all I envied him the devotion of his tender, silver-haired mother.

All this kindly family were dear to me, but the affection that I felt for Frank's mother in time grew almost painful, and my

heart positively yearned over her. She was a very delicate old lady, of low stature and somewhat stooping shoulders, but there was a wonderful dignity in the fragile figure; and in the face, with its luxuriant soft white hair, and still lustrous dark grey eyes, could be plainly read nobility of soul and the most kindly of dispositions. To see her kiss Frank, and to hear her "God bless you, my son," when she would leave us for the night, brought the tears into my eyes.

One evening this emotion seized upon me so strongly that it became apparent to her, and leading me a little apart from the others, she raised her eyes, and looked enquiringly into mine.

"What is it that is troubling you?" she said gently.

"There is nothing," I faltered, trying to avoid her questioning glance.

"Oh yes there is; I have seen it for some little time. You come so seldom now, and you are so silent."

"I could not tell you; you would not

understand what I feel," I said, looking wistfully down at her.

"Perhaps not, but I could sympathise with any trouble of yours, even if I did not entirely understand it."

"This is my trouble, then," I said, blurt-
ing it out in a feverish whisper; "the pangs
of envy gnaw me so keenly that I can no
longer endure them."

"Envy!" she murmured.

"Yes, envy. I envy Frank his mother.
Every loving word you speak to him, every
proud glance you bestow on him, cuts me to
the soul!"

I remember her look of wistful sympathy.
I recollect that she murmured some tender
words of hope and consolation; but I could
not stay to listen. An almost hysterical
paroxysm of pity for myself was upon me,
and fearing altogether to lose control over
myself I hurried from the house.

This happened at the close of the second
year of our life in Wilton Crescent, and from
that time I became a complete hermit,

socially speaking. I went absolutely nowhere, nor when Charlie had friends would I mingle with them.

Shortly after this my dear friend became engaged to Julia Nesbit, and then, as—despite repeated invitations—I would not accompany him to her brother's house, I began to see comparatively little of Charlie.

Night after night I sat alone in our comfortable little library brooding over my forlorn situation—reviewing the day's transactions—recognising that each succeeding evening saw me richer than I had been on the previous one; and yet, while I thirsted eagerly for gain, its acquisition brought me no real comfort.

“Money is no use in itself,” I would murmur bitterly; “I would lavish it all without a second thought to give pleasure to one I loved.”

Then with utter inconsistency I would commence my intricate calculations again, and work at them until my head ached and my eyes burned.

At length there arrived an evening when my depression and loneliness of spirit seemed to culminate. I had not seen Charlie all day—he had been sent for professionally before I came down in the morning—and when I returned home after my day's business he had gone to Hampstead as usual.

A heavy fog had hung over London all the day, and as evening approached it grew denser. I pulled aside the blind in the library and looked out. It was impossible to see across the road, and the gas lamps loomed mistily through the murky atmosphere.

“I can't help it,” I murmured, stretching myself wearily; “I must go out, I daren't sit here any longer by myself. Nesbit will persuade Charlie to stop all night on account of this fog, I know; and I don't feel somehow as if I could go to bed without exchanging a word with anyone. I have made twenty-five thousand pounds to-day!

Well, I wonder if I should feel any worse if I had lost a hundred thousand ? ”

Putting on my hat and great coat I let myself out, and with my hands plunged into my coat pockets I strode off into the darkness.

The thick choking mist made walking and breathing almost equally difficult ; by the time I reached Regent Street I was thoroughly tired, and my throat and mouth were parched and uncomfortable with the sulphurous smoky air. Altogether the brilliantly lighted entrance of the St. James' Restaurant was a welcome sight to me.

“ I will go in and have a brandy and soda,” I muttered as I approached it. “ Charlie may well say I am not in good condition, I have not walked more than a couple of miles and yet I am dead beat. I hope there will be some one I know about, if not I shall turn into the ‘ Criterion,’ and see the last act of the piece. I won't go home until bedtime, that's quite certain.

I have just come to the end of my tether with regard to my own society. I really couldn't stand another half hour alone in the library to-night."

I sauntered into the restaurant, ordered my brandy and soda, drank it, and feeling decidedly refreshed, looked around to see if among the crowd there was one familiar face.

"No," I muttered, "there is not one."

And then with a quick catch of my breath, and an indescribable suffocating sense of excitement, I stopped short.

A few steps from me, gazing at me with an expression of mingled astonishment and terror, was a tall dark young man, with a silky black moustache, and piercing brown eyes.

For an instant, motionless and fascinated, we gazed into each others eyes. The man was a stranger to me, but—and at the thought my heart began to throb wildly—he recognised me, there was no doubt of that, and from the manner of his recogni-

tion I was convinced that at last I had found an important clue to my lost identity.

With a desperate effort to recover myself I moved slowly towards him; but before I could reach his side, with a hasty exclamation he pushed his way through the crowded bar, and without a backward look disappeared through the swing doors which led to the street.

My blood on fire I rushed after him, but when I reached the street one glance showed me that any search for him would be utterly unavailing. The fog was even denser, and now it was impossible to see a yard either to the right or left.

Baffled, sick at heart, and weary, I pursued my way on foot to the nearest railway station, for, in consequence of the fog, no cabs were running.

“After all,” I thought, “Charlie might return; at any rate I will go home as quickly as possible on the chance.”

An absolute craving for sympathy was

upon me; my brain was in a ferment. Why had this man avoided me? From what did the horror and repugnance that had shone in his eyes when he looked upon me, arise?

“God help me,” I cried, “I must find him. I must learn what he has to tell.”

And then I shuddered.

“He is associated with some dark page in my life.” I muttered. “Dare I open it?”

CHAPTER XI.

THE train was in the station when, after groping my way with the utmost difficulty, I reached Charing Cross. Pushing past the guard, who knowing me as a season ticket holder held the gate open an instant longer for me, I rushed towards the carriages. There was clearly no time for me to get to my own division of the train, I must scramble in where I could.

In the first compartment I came to, a glance showed me that there were two men. I wished to be alone that I might think, and taking my fingers from the handle I hurried to the next, which was empty, and flung myself into it. Two or three seconds, and then the train moved on.

It had scarcely started when I heard a boyish laugh which startled me by its seemingly close proximity and the familiarity of its tone. Looking up, I saw that the second class compartment in which I sat was of a somewhat unusual build, the divisions separating one compartment from another, ceasing about a foot from the roof. Therefore, although I could distinctly hear everything that was said in the next carriage, I could not see the speakers.

“Well, that fellow was pretty well dazed by the fog, any way,” said the boyish voice, which I recognised now as that of Frank Nesbit’s talkative, impulsive young brother Harry; “he looked me straight in the face and did not know me. Perhaps though,” he continued with a fresh laugh, “he didn’t want to recognise me for fear I might seem to expect him to join me; these big guns don’t like to be seen travelling second class.”

“Is he a big gun, then?” inquired a strange voice, in which I fancied I could

detect a slight tremor, and which aroused my interest at once.

“Why, yes, I should think he was, rather.”

“In what way?”

“Why, in the best possible way from a worldly point of view,” the lad replied; “people say he will be one of the richest men in London in ten years if he goes on at his present rate; he has made no end of money already.”

“He doesn’t look like a rich man,” exclaimed the other with eager interest.

“No,” responded the boy, “he’s got awfully eccentric lately, and neglects his appearance and dress altogether; when I first knew him, three years ago, he was a tremendously handsome well-set-up fellow. But lately he’s got queer; not but what he must always have been funny, I should say,” continued young Harry, whose principal weakness was the love of hearing his own voice.

There was a momentary silence in the next carriage, and then the stranger said with ill-assumed indifference—

“What’s his name and profession?”

“He’s a speculator,” was the somewhat ambiguous answer, “and his name is Friend Perditus.”

“Friend Perditus! Is that Friend Perditus? The man that made that pot of money over those Mexican shares which went wrong the week after he’d sold them?”

“Yes, that’s the chap. Some people say that he must have made a compact with a certain gentleman who lives very much down stairs, but one thing is quite certain, he has the most phenomenal luck.”

“But, Friend Perditus! It’s an extraordinary name!”

“Well, you know, it’s not exactly his name, but he calls himself that.”

“What, did he choose his own name then!”

“Well—yes—I believe he did.”

“But why?”

Harry Nesbit evidently hesitated, but the temptation to talk was too strong for him.

“I am not altogether sure that I ought to tell you why,” he said; “my brother Frank says the less the matter’s talked about the better; but I don’t see what harm it will do to mention it to you; you are never likely to come in contact with him; you are leaving town almost at once, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I expect we shall; there doesn’t seem to be any opening for us here.”

“Well, then,” said the boy, instinctively lowering his voice, so that it was only with the greatest difficulty I could follow him, “the case of Friend Perditus is one of the most extraordinary, from a medical point of view, that has ever been heard of. Almost all the great brain specialists have seen him, but he baffles them all. He christened himself Friend Perditus about four years ago, when he first recovered his senses after an illness during which he had lain in a state of delirium for three months.”

“But if he recovered his senses, why did he need to christen himself? Why not have resumed his own name?”

“Because,” said the boy impressively, “he had no recollection of it, or of anything which preceded his accident. His past was a complete blank to him.”

“Great God!” was the involuntary exclamation.

“And so it has remained ever since,” continued Harry, in awe-stricken tones. “For the first year or two it was expected that his memory would suddenly return to him, but now the doctors seem to have given up all hopes.”

“And you say he recollects nothing, absolutely nothing?” was the earnest inquiry.

“Nothing; neither the land of his birth, nor his father, nor his mother. In fact, nothing.”

“Are you quite sure of this?” said the other, almost fiercely. “How can you know he holds back nothing from you? You are but a boy compared to him.”

“Well, I don’t see that, exactly,” exclaimed the lad, rather piqued; “but you can rely upon what I say, though I don’t pretend to be in his confidence myself. I get my information from my brother Frank, and from my sister, who is engaged to Dr. Hall, the fellow that pulled him through his illness, his inseparable chum, with whom he lives. If you asked them they would tell you exactly the same thing.”

Here the train pulled up at the next station, but the platform was empty, and after even a shorter pause than usual it moved on again. During that momentary pause I tried to make up my mind what I ought to do. Ought I to enter the next carriage and put an end to young Harry’s volubility or not? I was still hesitating when unexpectedly the train moved on, and I heard the conversation renewed.

“But how has Mr. Perditus made his money?” inquired the stranger, with the same transparent air of assumed indifference.

“Oh, well, you know, his diamonds gave him a famous start to begin with. They were worth close on forty thousand pounds, and with this forty thousand he has made no end by speculating.”

“His diamonds! What diamonds?” was the breathless query.

“Why, the diamonds that were round his waist sewn into a leathern belt when he was fished out of the sea. He was shipwrecked, you know, off the coast of Lancashire that celebrated and fatal night in March, 1880, when three vessels went down almost within sight of home. Which vessel he was aboard neither he nor any one else knows. He was floating stiff on his back when he was picked up by the fishermen, and he was given up for dead by everybody but Charlie Hall.”

“Ah, the man he lives with? Where did you say their house was?” the stranger asked earnestly.

“Oh, I didn’t know I mentioned it,” replied the boy. “They live at No. 60,

Wilton Crescent, Knightsbridge. It's not a big house, but an awfully expensive swell neighbourhood. Oh, do you get out here?"

"Yes, St. James's Park is the best for me. Good-bye; I have been much interested in what you've told me."

"Good-bye," Harry Nesbit faltered rather nervously, "You won't repeat what I've said about Perditus; I am afraid I should catch it from my people at home if they knew I had been so outspoken."

"Don't worry yourself," was the answer; "you have certainly done no harm by telling me the strange story."

"I hope not," said the lad, as the train came to a complete stop; "he's been rather huffy with us lately, but more particularly on that account I should not like to do anything he might think mean. So please forget what I've said, or at any rate don't repeat it."

"All right; set your mind at ease."

I heard the door open, and then, pulling my hat down over my brow, I leant forward

to see what manner of man it was that Harry had been regaling with my unfortunate history. It seemed to me an age between the opening of the door and the alighting of the stranger upon the platform. He spoke again as he was stepping out, keeping his face turned away from me.

“It will be as much as I can do to find my way home,” he said, “the fog is thicker than ever. See, the station is full of it.”

“Yes,” said young Nesbit, “I shall not be sorry to get out of London for a day or two. I start for Brighton to-morrow by the eight o’clock train. But I shall be home by the end of the week. Good-bye, again.”

The whistle sounded for the train to start, and then with a final nod to Harry Nesbit the stranger turned towards me.

In an instant I was on my feet and struggling desperately with the handle of the carriage in which I sat. Again my eyes had rested on the dark face of the man who had recognised me so evidently, less than half an hour before.

The train was almost in the tunnel before I succeeded in wrenching the obstinate door open, but, utterly oblivious of the danger I ran, I sprang out, the thick mist preventing my reckless conduct attracting attention, and then I rushed up the platform in pursuit.

But for the second time my quarry escaped me. When I reached the head of the stairs, and looked out into the blinding fog, not a trace of the man could I see.

Then I began to reproach myself for my precipitate and thoughtless conduct. Had I remained quietly where I was, I could have joined young Harry Nesbit at the next station and learned who his companion had been, and where I could meet and speak with him. Now I should have to subdue my impatience as best I might until the boy's return from Brighton. It was clearly impossible for me to get to see Harry before he started, and I did not wish to write to him on the subject. It would be making the matter too important in his eyes, and I

could not tell but what I might desire to keep my former connection with this mysterious man a secret from all but Charlie. In fact I had a horrible conviction upon me that this would prove to be the case; for if our acquaintance had been of an ordinary nature, why should his countenance have expressed the emotions it did when we met? And again, why did he deliberately deceive the boy as to his knowledge of me?

Oh how thankful I was when I heard Charlie's latch-key in the lock that night, and how little I deserved the interest and patience with which he listened to my story.

Half the night we sat up talking and trying to find some reasonable explanation for the extraordinary conduct of the unknown man; but naturally our surmises were of the very wildest and vaguest description.

The more we talked the more bewildered we grew, and when the hands of the clock pointed to three Charlie rose, and, shaking his wise, ugly head, said kindly—

“It’s no good, Friend, the knot is too hard to unravel to-night. Our heads may be clearer to-morrow morning. Go to bed and rest, dear old fellow. If the worst comes to the worst, Harry Nesbit will be back on Friday evening, we will waylay him at the station as if by accident, and hear what he can tell us, that is if you don’t feel inclined to come up to Hampstead,” he continued wistfully.

My heart reproached me, I had been so full of my own concerns I had never once thought of these kind friends.

“We will see about that,” I murmured hurriedly; “are they all well, Charlie?”

“Quite well, and they ask for you so often, Friend.”

“God bless them,” I faltered, and then I wrung his hand and went to my room.

Utterly exhausted I slept soundly, and when I awoke in the morning the sun was shining brightly into my room, almost as brightly, it seemed to me, as five years ago it had shone that morning into my little room at the hospital. It must have fallen

across my bed in the same way, I suppose ; anyway it recalled the moment of my re-awaking to life very distinctly to me.

A few minutes I lay revelling in the cheery sight,—for a week or more the gloomy impenetrable fogs had continued—and as I gazed my heart revived and softened. I thought of Charlie with the old gush of tenderness, and then I thought with shame of the callous, hardened being, which the pursuit of money had made of me.

“ If I could only find some other interest in life,” I murmured wistfully, “ perhaps through this man ”—and then I shook my head and sighed, as I owned to myself that it was very difficult to imagine anything good in connection with this mysterious being, and yet—

Charlie was already in the breakfast-room when I came down ; he greeted me even more heartily than usual.

“ Why, friend, old man ! ” he cried, “ your romantic encounter last night has done you good ; you look decidedly more

fit this morning than you have done for many a day past."

"I am glad of it," I answered cheerily, for somehow, God only knows why, my heart was lighter than it had been for months—"I have not been so absorbed but what I could see how disapprovingly your medical eye has rested on me for many weeks past. I am more than ever an enigma to myself this morning, Charlie, for why in the world should I feel as if a load had been suddenly lifted from my shoulders? Come, solve the problem, dear and wise old sage. There was certainly nothing reassuring in the aspect of that man last night, quite the reverse, in fact."

Placing his two hands firmly on my shoulders, Charles Hall looked gravely, but very tenderly, into my eyes.

"Do you really wish to know what I think, Friend?"

"I do, indeed," I replied, startled by his almost solemn earnestness.

"And I may speak plainly without offending you?"

I winced, and my eyes sank under his.

“God forgive me,” I murmured conscience stricken, “I know I have been an ill-tempered brute lately.”

“Ah, no,” he interrupted hastily, “I didn’t mean that, Friend, upon my soul I did not. But you have been on a constant tension of excitement, and have become more irritable than nature intended you to be. Now I will tell you why you are more your real self this morning. Your mind has been distracted out of the narrow groove in which you have forced it to run for so long. Any fresh anxiety must be a relief and a benefit to you, no matter from what cause it springs. Oh, my boy, don’t think I have judged you harshly; heaven knows, in your position, I might have done far worse myself; but, Friend, my heart has ached for you more than you can ever guess, I fancy.”

“I was not worth so much feeling, Charlie,” I cried, wringing his hand in mine.

“Perhaps not,” he answered, regaining his cheerfulness, and beaming on me with the truest affection shining in his eyes, “it may be bad taste on my part, and undoubtedly there is a large amount of self-glorification in the interest I feel in you, but this is quite certain, there is only one other person in the world who is as dear to me as you are, Friend. You can guess who that is.”

“Easily,” I cried, “and upon my soul, Charlie, it’s a relief to me to recognise that, in that quarter at least, your judgment has been beyond reproach.”

We settled ourselves at the breakfast table, and, after pouring out the coffee, Charlie spoke again.

“I wish she had a sister, Friend.”

“Who?” I cried, startled out of the reverie into which I had fallen.

“Why Julia, of course. I wish she had a sister, and that you admired her.”

I shook my head dolefully.

“Don’t wish me such ill-luck as that, Charlie.”

“ Ill-luck ! ”

“ Yes, for if I had admired her the probability is that the sentiment would not have been reciprocal.”

“ Oh, humbug ! ”

“ Well, if it had, that would have been worse still.”

“ What on earth do you mean, Friend ? ”

“ Why, how could I ask any woman to be my wife ? My past is a mystery, and my present life you yourself admit is not one to be proud of.”

“ Well, then,” he cried, bringing his fist down upon the table with an emphasis that made the cups and saucers ring again, “ give up your present life and be worthy of yourself. When you are that, you need not be afraid to ask any woman in the world to share your home.”

His eyes positively blazed with enthusiasm on my behalf, and roused out of myself I leant across the table towards him.

“ What can I do ? ” I asked. “ I must

have occupation, and I should not have patience to study for any profession, even if I had the requisite talent, which I have not."

But if I thought to pose him by this question I was mistaken. Taking a chair which stood near mine, Charles Hall laid his hand on my arm. He spoke very calmly, but I could see his face twitching with suppressed excitement.

"I hoped that the time would come when you might ask me this question, Friend. So I have kept my eyes open. By a strange chance last night at Frank Nesbit's I heard of something that I believe would suit you down to the ground, if you would only take it into consideration."

"Something that would suit me!" I ejaculated in wonder. "What, in the name of goodness?"

"Well, you know the firm of Simpson, Marshall and Company?"

"The great china merchants? Oh, yes, I know their names well. Why, the death

of old Marshall a month ago, made quite a little flutter in the money market."

"Well, it appears old Marshall was the mainspring of that concern, the present representatives of the firm being a couple of young men fresh from college, with no experience and very little aptitude for business."

"Ah! that's serious, considering the importance of their enterprises; but I don't quite see how this condition of things affects me."

"In this way. It seems that as, through the death of Mr. Marshall, his share of the capital will have to be withdrawn, these two young men have been advised to take a partner into the firm; but a man with sufficient money to buy into such a business as that is not easy to meet with, especially as they want money and business capability as well. In fact, Stanniwell said the other day in confidence to Frank Nesbit, which confidence jolly old Frank broke without the slightest compunction, 'Friend

Perditus is the only man I know who would do for the post. He has money, luck, and excellent judgment.' ”

“But I know nothing whatever of that business,” I exclaimed.

“You could learn,” Charlie cried. “Stanniwell says with your clear head you would have it all at your fingers ends in six months, if you set to work in earnest; and he ought to be a good judge.”

“How much do they want?” I asked.

“Oh, an awful amount, it appears to me, but according to Stanniwell not an unreasonable one—a couple of hundred thousand pounds; but then your income would be at once about forty thousand.”

“Well, I’ll take it into consideration,” I said musingly. “I don’t suppose the matter will be arranged in a hurry. The fact is I don’t quite know what I am worth, but more than a couple of hundred thousand, I should say.”

“You mustn’t expect to make money so

quickly, Friend, if you go in for mercantile pursuits," Charlie continued; "but, my boy, I can't tell you how thankful I should be to see you safely settled, and employing your great talents in some honourable, respectable way."

Stung to the quick, I drew back from him.

"You use hard terms, Charlie," I muttered, in cruel mortification; "I am not aware that I have been dishonourable in any way. I fancy I should have the same abhorrence for any mean or dirty action that you would yourself."

"I am sure of it, Friend," he replied quickly, "and that is why I have grieved over your infatuation so bitterly. I know that your eyes have been shut, and are shut even now, to the real facts of the case, and I have not had the courage to try to open them. Friend, you would blame a man who spent his life in a whirl of feverish excitement at the gambling tables at Monte Carlo, you would not

be inclined to trust that man with any dear interest of yours, would you? Well, for three years past you have been a gambler, nothing more or less; but your excitement has been fiercer and you have played for stakes which would not be tolerated even in that atmosphere of moral degradation. Why, my boy, the noblest man in the world must deteriorate if he stoop to such an existence as this. It has been a positive torture to me to see you ruining your good heart and your splendid physique, and to feel so powerless to help you."

"I did not know," I faltered, inexpressibly pained at the intensity of his emotion. "Indeed, Charlie, I did not recognise——"

"I know that, Friend, and therefore I have felt terribly responsible in this matter. Thank goodness the ice is broken between us now."

"And please God it shall never film over the warmth of our affection again,"

I cried. "I will make no promises, Charlie, about this new affair, but," here I rose and took his hand between both of mine, "I pledge you my sacred word that from this time forward I will give up my present course of life, and once more I humbly thank God for your friendship."

A tear actually ran down Charlie Hall's sallow cheek, but his eyes were radiant with delight.

"I am the happiest fellow in the world this morning, I do believe," he cried, "but I must find you as good a wife as I hope to have myself—or nearly as good, Julia's exact equal does not exist upon this earth—before I am satisfied."

"Oh, don't worry yourself about that," I said smiling, but with rather a sad heart. "In years to come I may possibly think differently, but at present—well, I won't talk about it. If you could find me a mother, now, I would fall down on my knees and worship you, but a wife——"

"Well, my boy, I am thinking of a

mother-in-law, that's not far from the mark."

It was impossible to help laughing at his grave face.

"Such a mother-in-law as yours will be, is one in a thousand," I replied. "As a rule you must admit they would not be considered a very satisfactory substitute for the real thing."

With another hearty shake of the hand he left me, and the next instant I saw him descend the steps and start off upon his daily round of professional duties.

As he passed the window where I stood, he looked up, and his cherry smile reminded me still further how burdensome had been the anxiety he had been bearing on my account. I had not seen so sunny a smile on his face for a long time, and I felt my cheek grow hot with remorse as I remembered how much I must have spoilt by my gloomy want of sympathy, the days that should have been the happiest in his life to him.

CHAPTER XII.

THAT morning I spent in examining my circumstances, and by the hour of luncheon and Charlie's return from his round I knew exactly how I stood.

At that moment I had in the bank one hundred and fifty thousand pounds, besides a further sum of seventy-five thousand invested in shares in various companies which were at that moment paying a large dividend, and which, when they had reached a certain point of prosperity, I intended as usual to sell out of, at a very large profit."

"I have not been long making up my mind, Charlie," I cried, as he came bustling into the room. "I will commence approaches to the firm to-morrow, and

whether things in that direction look promising or not, I'll realise all my shares and give up speculating. There, there's my hand upon it."

As we shook hands once more, the postman's knock resounded through the house.

"There is the seal of my compact," I said; and then the door opened, and our man entered with a letter.

"For Mr. Perditus, sir," he said, as Charlie stretched out his hand.

"For me!" I exclaimed—I seldom received letters at home; all my business communications being addressed to Mr. Stanniwell's office—"And, by Jove!"

I waited till the man had left the room, and then, still eyeing the unopened envelope in my hand, I cried in great surprise—

"Charlie, this is from a woman! No lady ever writes to me! Who in the world can it be?"

He took the envelope from me, and turning it over and over, as I had done, examined it carefully.

“The post-mark is S.W.,” he murmured, “and that’s all I can make out. But it’s a pretty fist, isn’t it? Hullo, Friend, perhaps it’s the young lady herself!”

“What young lady?”

“Oh, Friend, you are developing powers of dissimulation, I am afraid,” he said, with a chuckle. “This is the second time you have tried to humbug me this morning. Why, the young lady I am on the look-out for—the young lady whose merits and beauty are to come somewhere near my Julia’s.”

“Charlie, you are talking nonsense for once,” I remarked, as, opening my penknife, I proceeded to slit the top of the carefully sealed envelope. “I can guess the object of the note, though not the writer, perfectly well. This comes from one of your young lady patients, I know—some one that you have been gushing about me to, and it contains a polite request for a donation towards some fancy fair or other equally frivolous form of charity. The wonder is that you have not brought them down upon me in

shoals long before this. Now, then, how much does she want?"

I unfolded the paper, which was strongly perfumed and covered with delicate old-fashioned hand-writing of the Italian school, very rarely met with in these strong-minded practical days, but which, I fancy, all men have a very decided leaning towards.

But I forgot the charm of the writing—I forgot everything—in the tremendous shock of the first three words my eyes fell upon.

Staggering to the window, I threw it open. An indescribable sensation of faintness had come over me, and I felt myself gasping for breath.

"What is it, Friend?" cried Charlie, hurrying to my side. "Why, man alive, your face is as white as death! What has happened?"

"I am going mad in earnest, I am afraid," I panted. "People's eyes don't play them tricks unless there is something wrong with their brains, do they?"

“In God’s name, what do you mean, man ?”

“Why,” I gasped, crumpling the letter in one trembling hand, while I passed the other over my moist brow, “I distinctly saw written here, so plainly that they seemed to burn into my very soul, words that could not possibly exist except in my imagination.”

“How do you know that ?” was the quick enquiry ; “look again, man ! look again !”

“I dare not,” I cried despairingly ; “the words mocked me and taunted me with my bitter loneliness.”

Seriously alarmed, Charles Hall laid his hand upon the paper. Instinctively I clutched it more tightly.

“Give it to me,” he said kindly and persuasively ; “give it to me, Friend : let me share your perplexity, whatever it is ?”

For another moment I hesitated, and then my fingers relaxed their hold, and he drew the paper gently from them. With a groan

I turned away, and covered my burning eyes with my hands. The paper rustled softly in his fingers, and then I heard a cry from him of such utter astonishment that my heart stopped beating for a second, and my brain seemed to reel and rock.

Rushing to him, I laid my hand upon his arm and shook it in my wild excitement.

“What is it?” I shrieked; “what have you read? For heaven’s sake, Charlie, don’t stand silent there; tell me what you have read.”

“Only three words,” he gasped; “only three words, Friend; but they have knocked all the breath out of my body.”

“What are they?” I cried, almost frantic.

“I cannot tell what they mean,” he murmured, with white lips. “Oh, my dear old boy, pray God there is no mistake; but this letter addressed to you, commences, ‘My dear son.’”

He dropped into a chair as he spoke, and falling on my knees by his side—for indeed

my limbs refused to support me—with shaking hands we spread the paper out, and together with many a smothered exclamation we read the letter through.

Then, with a mighty cry, I flung my arms upon the table, and burying my head in them, with my lips pressed to the paper, I broke into a veritable passion of sobs and tears, and as I wept the sluice-gates of my heart seemed to open to admit a flood of tender rapture.

“Oh, thank God, thank God!” I murmured. “Ah, my mother, my dear mother! at last, at last I have found you! Oh, thank God, thank God, for his infinite mercy!”

Charlie passed his arm round my bowed shoulders, but he did not speak; he would not by one word interrupt the sacred joy that was consuming me; but once more his silent sympathy soothed and quieted me, and presently I raised my head and, with glistening eyes, looked into his kind, anxious face.

“Don’t be afraid, Charlie,” I faltered,

“joy never kills. Let us read it again. At present I am in a state of chaos. I know that a marvellous happiness has befallen me, but now I want to study the words. Ah, Charlie, see—you might well say it was pretty writing, so clear, so firm; and yet, God bless her, my mother cannot be young.”

I kissed the paper again. No man ever pressed his lips more tenderly to his first love-letter than I did to that; and then I read the precious words once more.

The re-perusal of the letter, however, did not afford me quite an unmixed delight; and by the time I had come to the end of it a certain sense of uneasiness began to mingle with my pleasure. The main cause of rejoicing was unaltered, it is true, and my heart overflowed with gratitude for this inestimable boon. I had found my mother, and she had written to me kindly and affectionately; but I could not fail to perceive, now that I was calmer and more able to judge, that there was a certain air of reserve

about the letter, evidently arising from some barrier, which so far as I could understand, I had raised between myself and the family for whom I had yearned so long and so bitterly.

The letter was dated from a house in Hart Street, Westminster, and was worded in this way :

“ MY DEAR SON,

“ Possibly I may be acting unwisely in seeking you out, but mothers are not often discreet in these matters ; and again, if the strange story that I hear of you is true, you may be unable to make the advance, which in other circumstances I certainly should have a right to expect from you. It is so long, so long, my son, since you left me ; more than five years, and in all that time you have never sent me one word. For the last four years I suppose I must not hold you accountable ; but before that surely I had some claim upon you, and you might have eased the bitter heartache and anxiety I

suffered on your account. However, you were very young, and perhaps no man can understand how unchanging a woman's love is, and that a widowed mother does not judge her eldest son as the world judges him. Perhaps you were not sure of my forgiveness; I think that must have been the reason you did not write to me once. Such a doubt is not just to me, but I will not reproach you now, nor will I ever. Let the past be buried between us—what's done cannot be undone. Come to me to-morrow at twelve o'clock. We are leaving England very shortly, but I cannot go without pressing my eldest born once more to my heart. Oh, my son, do not fear me, you shall never hear one harsh word from your loving and sorrowful mother,

HORTENSE GUADELLA."

Then there came the postscript.

"I hear you have done well in the world. I can almost find it in my heart to regret

this ; it seems to separate you further from us, and if you are surrounded by luxury and wealth you may feel to want your mother less. Yes, my son, money raises up friends for us, but it is in the time of poverty and trouble one looks in vain for a kind word or an outstretched hand. Come to me, let me see you once again, and then we will pursue our separate paths if you wish it. A mother should not sue to her son, nor will I."

It was an immense relief to me to find that Charles Hall did not share the misgivings which this letter aroused in my mind, clapping me heartily on the back he congratulated me warmly.

"It is a charming letter," he cried ; "a tender, womanly, and yet dignified letter ; my dear boy, I am more thankful on your account than I can say."

"But," said I, "what can I have done, Charlie ? It seems almost as if I had deserted my mother."

"I don't see that," he replied, "you can't take these last four years into account at

all; and I am strongly under the impression that you will find you left your home in some sort of freak; most probably you were bound for the Diamond Fields; the diamonds in your possession and the visit to Cape Town seem to prove that, and if you had stated your intention you probably knew your mother would have withheld her permission for your starting on so dangerous and doubtful an expedition."

"But why should I not have written?" I asked, the clouds which had gathered over the brightness of my new found happiness, dispersing before my dear friend's hopeful words.

"Why, Friend, your silence may be accounted for in many ways. In the first place you may have written and the letter gone wrong, but I should fancy the more probable explanation is that you resolved to justify your wilfulness by returning to your family a rich man, and that until you could tell them of your success you would tell them nothing."

I drew a deep breath of relief. Charlie's

reasoning powers were very acute and had stood me in good stead so often that in any difficulty apart from my business enterprises, about which his opinion was worthless, I had come to rely upon his judgment almost unquestioningly.

Once more, therefore, I abandoned myself to the unmixed joy which had filled my heart before these doubts crept in. I had been unmindful and careless of my mother's feelings in the past; but in the future, please God, I would atone to the uttermost by devoting myself heart and soul to her happiness. She should never know another heartache or anxiety if I could stand between her and trouble; and for absolutely the first time, notwithstanding the feverish greed with which I had amassed money, I was thankful for the possession of a large fortune.

From the tone of her letter I fancied that my mother's circumstances were not easy, and inwardly I rejoiced at the thought. Heaven had indeed been good to me! What

transport I should feel in surrounding her with every comfort and luxury! Not a pleasure that money could buy should she lack; and surely by untiring patience and assiduity I should succeed in making her declining years happy, since in spite of all my negligences and offences she loved me still.

And there were others, too. "We are leaving England shortly," my mother had said: and again, "a mother does not judge her eldest son as the world judges him." There were, perhaps, brothers and sisters waiting to welcome me—well, there was room in my yearning heart for them all! I was evidently the head of the family, and it would be my duty as well as my joy to provide for them, and to advance them in the world. So now every farthing of my money was doubly valuable to me, for it represented their joys and their profit.

Then, suddenly, I recognised the full benefit of Charlie's suggestion with regard to the partnership in the great mercantile

firm. For the future, with others depending on me, it would have been impossible for me to continue my former risky investments. Even now I was so imbued with a sense of the dangerous position of some of my means, that I could not rest inactive.

Pulling out my watch I sprang to my feet.

“Charlie,” I said, “thank goodness there is something I can do this afternoon. I shall catch Stanniwell if I take a hansom. I shall give him instructions to sell out every share I possess to-morrow, whether at a loss or profit. I can’t afford to speculate now that my money means more to me than so much hard coin. And, Charlie, if I wasn’t ashamed to look them all in the face, I should like to go up to Hampstead, and get Nesbit to give me a letter of introduction to young Simpson.”

“Well, do so,” cried Charlie, with sparkling eyes. “I can answer for your being received with open arms. Mrs. Nesbit has

been longing to see you for an age. She has some extraordinary notion in her dear old head that she is in some way responsible for your absence."

I smiled, I could afford to smile now, but my heart was very tender as I recollected my parting with her.

"Then I will meet you there, Charlie," I said. "I will dine in town, and come straight on; I have plenty to do, thank goodness; if I had not I could not exist until twelve o'clock to-morrow. Oh, Charlie, what will she be like, I wonder? I shall be drawing fancy portraits of her in my mind's eye all the time."

"Well," he replied, "according to the general rule, that sons take after their mothers, your mother ought to be a very striking old lady indeed."

Then he looked rather wistfully at me.

"My wife will be well off in one respect at least," he murmured. "I am not jealous, I know it now for a fact. From my soul I rejoice with you; but where shall I come

in your heart now, Friend ? Well, that depends on the number of brothers and sisters, doesn't it ?" he added with a little sigh.

I could not speak, but I clasped his hand in mine, and I am sure he understood that nothing in the world could ever lessen the warmth of my affection for the preserver of my life and reason, and the noblest, most devoted friend that ever an unworthy man was blessed with.

By good luck I caught Mr. Stanniwell, and before I left his office I succeeded in making him believe that I really meant in downright earnestness what I said. At first he could not credit the evidence of his own ears when I declared my positive intention of realising at any sacrifice, but ultimately he saw that all arguments on the subject would be utterly useless, and then, though with a rather bad grace, he agreed to carry out my wishes to the letter."

"To-morrow afternoon I will come again, Stanniwell," I said, with a farewell shake of

the hand, "and I shall hope to find matters *en train* at least, if not finally settled."

"All right," he replied gloomily, "since you are determined on such a ridiculous thing, unfortunately there will be no difficulty about doing it at once. I could sell double your number of shares in half an hour; why the run on them is tremendous. I wish I could persuade you to hold them, if only for a week longer; you would make a large profit by doing so."

"Not one day longer," I said firmly; "remember, Stanniwell, not one day. Now good-bye; I am sorry to have fallen so far short of your expectations of me," I concluded, with a cheerful laugh, and then I ran quickly down the narrow uncarpeted stairs, which had grown so familiar to me, and hailing a hansom desired to be driven to Hart Street, Westminster.

"I must see the house to-night, at any rate," I murmured, "and perhaps I might even catch a glimpse of her at the window."

But I was disappointed in this. When I reached Hart Street the blinds were pulled down and the gas lighted. It was a satisfaction to me, however, to find the street a very inferior one, and the houses mean and unattractive. How different my mother's surroundings should be before another day had passed over her beloved head !

At Hampstead the warmth of my reception nearly unmanned me, and I know, despite my most earnest efforts, one or two large drops ran down my cheeks when my dear, honoured old friend, laying her hands on my shoulders, raised her lips to mine and kissed me, murmuring —

“God bless you, my dear, you will not shun me now, will you? May you be very happy, Friend. Your mother will be proud of her son, I am sure of that.”

As long as I live that evening will stand out in my recollection as perhaps the most perfectly happy I ever spent. Who has not recognised the truth, that realisation seldom

if ever equals the joy of anticipation ? They were all so good to me, so hearty and so loving in their sympathy. A stranger entering that cosy, luxurious room, would have imagined that to each person in it had happened some especial stroke of good fortune, so radiant were the faces and so entirely did they enter into the joy that filled my breast.

How we talked, and how we wondered ! And how sweetly Charlie's pretty Julia smiled when she declared that mother was actually blushing at Friend's flattery.

"Nay," I said, holding the kind old hand in mine, "I could not flatter your mother ; when I tell you that I hope mine will be like her, I say what I mean, neither more nor less."

"What, white hairs, stooping shoulders, and all ?" she murmured, with quite a youthful flush in her pale, delicate cheeks.

"Everything. I would have her your counterpart, if I could," I said warmly. "I like to think of my mother as need-

ing the support of my strength and youth.”

And so we talked, and my heart rejoiced in the sunshine of their ready sympathy ; and in my dreams that night I still heard my old friend's farewell blessing.

CHAPTER XIII.

How carefully I dressed myself the next morning, and how horrified I was to see that my wardrobe had fallen into a very unsatisfactory condition. I was half an hour before I could find a coat that would suit me at all, and even then I was uncomfortably aware that its seams were certainly not innocent of shine.

“I’ll pay a visit to the tailor’s this afternoon, that’s quite certain,” I murmured. “I am not afraid of my mother, she is not likely to examine her son’s clothes too critically ; but, if there should be any young people about, their eyes will be sharper, and as the head of the family I should

be sorry to forfeit their respect at the outset."

I confided my uneasiness about my costume to Charlie, but he did not seem to think its deficiencies were observable.

"It may be, old fellow," he said, "that I am not a very good judge where you are concerned. It seems to me, that so far as clothes go, you are a thorough-paced howler this morning; but then, you know, you have been going about anything but spick and span for the last six months."

I thought of young Harry Nesbit's uncomplimentary remarks on the subject, and rising from the breakfast-table I walked to the sideboard and deliberately scrutinised my appearance in its large looking-glass.

"Well," I said at length, "I do look rather unkempt I must admit."

"Oh, you are splendid this morning, comparatively," was the somewhat provoking reply. "At any rate you have a good healthy colour in your cheeks and some

life in your eyes. You have been an awfully haggard, mournful-looking individual lately."

"That's not much consolation, for I don't like the look of myself even under these improved circumstances," I continued. "Can you suggest anything? I want to make as good an impression as I can."

"Then I should 'to the barber's with my beard,' if I were you," replied Charlie. "It would be quite correct as it is if you wanted to represent some Scandinavian war-god, but it is a little eccentric, to say the least, in our times and part of the world."

In less than half an hour I was under the hands of a hairdresser, who I desired to make me everything that I ought to be according to the present fashion.

Assiduously the man cut and clipped and shaved, and, soothed by the operation, taking no heed of what he was about, I fell into a profound dreamy reverie, out of which I was aroused by his pulling the

wrapper from my shoulders, and acquainting me with the fact that he had done what he could, and hoped that I was satisfied.

Rather confused, for my mind had been far distant, wandering in a paradise of gentle loving thoughts, I rose, and walked away.

“Won’t you look at yourself, sir?” said the man in an injured tone. “I think the improvement is very marked.”

Recalled to myself I went back to the glass and lifted my eyes, then, with a shout of surprise, I turned quickly round again.

“Where is he?” I cried, looking in astonishment about the large room, which was empty save for the presence of the hairdresser and myself.

“Who do you mean, sir?” asked the man, shrinking a little as he read the fierce excitement in my eyes.

“Why, that man who looked into the glass just now with me. I recognised his face distinctly. Where has he gone?”

“There has been no one here, sir, within

the last ten minutes," replied the hair-dresser, visibly alarmed, backing towards the door.

"Nonsense," I said roughly. "You needn't attempt to deceive me, do you suppose I haven't eyes in my head? He was looking at me, and I at him. Give me my hat, I must follow him at once."

Rather shakily the man handed the hat to me, but as I turned away, again on the opposite side of the room the familiar face caught my eye.

"Why, there he is!" I cried, pointing with my finger. "Now will you tell me there is no one there?"

With a very white scared countenance the man laid his trembling hand upon my arm.

"Sir," he faltered, "you are acting, are you not? You can't be in earnest."

Struck by the reality of his consternation, I turned my eyes from the eager face that was gazing so straight into mine.

"Not in earnest," I repeated. "Why, what do you mean?"

“I mean, sir, that you are playing a trick upon me. You must know as well as I do that you and I are alone in this room, and that you are looking at yourself.”

“Looking at myself!” I echoed blankly.

“Why yes, sir,” replied the man, with a little nervous uneasy laugh, “of course you are; and I see what you are up to now, though at the first moment I must say you gave me a bit of a fright; you did it so uncommonly natural. Shaving your chin and whiskers does make a lot of difference in you; I never saw a gentleman so much altered by shaving, in fact. Oh, Lord, I shall laugh over this for a long time; you took me in splendidly, sir, I’d back you against any actor I’ve ever seen.”

But though the fellow’s tones grew more confident as he proceeded, I could see that his lips still twitched nervously, and that he constantly glanced at the glass door which separated us from the outer shop, as if he were longing for some interruption

from that quarter ; nor were his fears at all quieted when, removing my hat again, I sat down in front of one of the large mirrors, and, leaning my elbows on the white marble slab which contained the brushes and combs and other hair-dressing paraphernalia, studied my changed countenance with the most intense curiosity and interest.

The sensation I experienced at that moment was a most marvellous one, and had my mind been less occupied than it was, I fancy the shock of that recognition would almost have unhinged me. It was something so extraordinary to gaze at myself, to know that my eyes had rested on that same countenance hundreds and hundreds of times before, and yet not to have one single association with it.

It was curious to me to notice, also, that on this occasion this glimpse of the past, though in itself more astonishing than either of those that had preceded it, did not affect my physical condition in the same way that my two previous flashes of

memory had done. My brain was excited, naturally, but not in the same dizzy way as at Winchester or in the Standard Theatre. I had simply recognised the face, and, having no notion that it was my own, fancied that still another link between myself and the past had arisen in my path.

Perfectly regardless of the hairdresser's fidgety coughs and anxious glances in my direction, for half an hour I sat there striving with all my might and main to pierce the dark cloud that hung over me, but in vain. At length the worried anxious look in my own eyes recalled the old French doctor's advice to me.

"Make no effort to recover your memory," he had said. "Every time you strain your mental powers you retard your chance of ultimate recovery. You cannot force nature."

With a sigh I passed my hand over my ruffled brow, and, gazing with pitying kindness at my own wistful reflection, murmured :

“Never mind, your mother will tell you what you want to know. Why should you worry yourself now? Leave yourself in her hands, and God’s.”

I rose again, and without a word to the frightened man, who I am quite sure imagined that I was thoroughly demented, walked out of the shop and into the open air.

It was a bright morning in March, but there was a cold wind blowing, and, bereft of my thick beard, I shivered chillily. I did not regret its loss, however, for the familiarity of my aspect was a comfort to me, and, though this was a minor consideration on my own account, being anxious to impress my mother favourably, I could not help perceiving, with some satisfaction, that the hairdresser’s opinion of the improvement effected in my appearance by the removal of my voluminous hirsute appendage, quite coincided with my own. I was certainly far more presentable without it.

As I entered Hart Street, Westminster, I heard Big Ben proclaim in heavy, ponderous tones, that it still wanted half an hour of the appointed time. I made up my mind at once, however, that there was no necessity for forcing myself to endure the misery of walking up and down outside the house until the actual moment arrived. In all probability my mother was at this instant anxiously awaiting me, and although it was not likely that her condition of feverish impatience equalled mine, still I could scarcely doubt that she also was longing for the meeting.

Resolutely schooling myself into some show of calmness, for I felt it was absolutely incumbent on me, for her sake, to support my share of the trying interview with the utmost composure I could summon to my aid, I walked once up and down the entire length of Hart Street, which, with its swarms of untidy, screaming children, looked even more forlorn and squalid in the

bright sunlight than it had done the evening before.

The thought that my mother was suffering day after day the discomfort of such miserable sights and sounds so worked upon my feelings that I had hard work to prevent myself breaking into a run as I neared the house a second time, so impatient was I to rescue her from them, and remove her to a spot more suited to the refinement of mind which I was sure she must possess.

With a fluttering heart, and a tingling in all my veins, I mounted the crumbling dirty steps, and lifted my hand to the rusty, loosely-hung knocker.

“Will she be alone,” I muttered, as I waited for admittance, “or will there be others with her? Pray God she may be alone. Oh that the next hour were come and gone, and that I were sitting quietly with her dear hand clasped in mine, reading my complete forgiveness in her tender eyes!”

After a very long delay the house door was opened by a most wretched, wan-looking little servant girl, whose dirty, torn cotton frock was pinned across her chest, and whose unbrushed, dusty hair had escaped from its coarse net and hung down her back.

Altogether there was something so pitiable and desolate about the appearance of this forlorn little maid that I drew back a step, and glanced instinctively at the number of the house. Above the tumble-down knocker, in almost obliterated letters, were the figures 13.

“Still,” I thought, “there may be a mistake, some people write their eights very much the same as they do their threes. However, I’d better ask.”

“Is this Mrs. Guadella’s house?” I inquired.

At once the child’s white, unhealthy cheek flushed, and a quick look of anxiety came into her tired eyes.

“It isn’t her house, sir; but she rents the

drawing-rooms from missus," she answered, and then went on, nervously screwing the corner of her soiled apron round and round, until she had twisted it into a hole, "Oh, sir, please are you Mr. Perditus?"

"Yes," I answered, astonished and horrified to find that this was in truth my poor mother's home.

"But it's not twelve, sir. Mrs. Guadella told me you was coming at twelve. Don't say as how I kept you waiting so long, and that I hadn't tidied myself up, please sir. I've been at work since five o'clock this morning, and I couldn't get through quicker; but Mrs. Guadella said I was to be sure and get myself clean before twelve. You won't tell her, sir, will you?"

My heart rose in my throat in a hard lump. Such utter misery as this I had never come in contact with.

Thrusting my hand into my pocket I drew out a handful of loose coins, and, taking from the heap a half-sovereign, I pressed it into the dirty, cold little hand.

A puzzled, half frightened expression came into the girl's pinched face ; and then, to my dismay, her shoulders and contracted chest began to heave, while she clasped her toil-worn hands together in a piteous effort to control the emotion which my most unexpected liberality had aroused.

She did not attempt to thank me, but she looked at me with such an infinitude of gratitude in her forlorn eyes, that I turned almost sick with sympathy--sympathy with her and with my mother, whose womanly heart had been wrung as mine was being wrung now, God only knew for how long.

“No wonder,” I thought, as I mounted the creaking uncarpeted stairs, “no wonder she appointed a late hour for our meeting ; I can imagine she shrank from letting me know the full extent of her necessity. Ah, my mother, you thought to spare me this self reproach. You know that I am rich, and yet you would rather have suffered this than have seemed to humble your dignity

by appealing to your son through such a miserable evidence as this poor child of your need of assistance."

The narrow stairs were ill lighted, but the apartment into which I was ushered appeared at the first moment absolutely dark. The atmosphere was, too, insufferably close, stale tobacco and other odours mingling together into an almost insupportable stuffiness.

I waited an instant on the threshold, afraid to advance; I heard the rattling of curtain rings along the pole, and then the girl hurriedly drew up a dirty blind, leaving it all askew, and let the light in upon the most wretched room I had ever seen.

A horrible greasy drugget covered the floor, a rickety table with a stained crumbstrewn cloth occupied the centre of the chamber, and the furniture, originally of the commonest description, including the piano, was positively falling to pieces with wear and rough usage.

All this I took in at a glance, and then

pointing meaningly to some folding doors which separated this from another room, the girl whispered to me,

“I was just coming to sweep in here, sir, but you won’t seem to notice anything amiss, will you, when Mrs. Guadella comes in?”

I nodded, and immediately she left me alone, and I heard her knock at an adjoining door, which I imagined was another entrance into the apartment with which the folding doors communicated.

At once my surmise proved to be correct. A muffled tone came to me, and at the sound I started, and my heart beat more and more rapidly. Only that door divided us now; in a minute or two at the longest I should see my mother, and then within an hour she should leave this wretched place. I would take her straight to an hotel, and she should live there, until I could provide a more comfortable home for her.

Wracked with impatience, I strode up

and down the crowded room, examining with great curiosity the heterogeneous litter which cumbered chairs and sofa and piano top. My disposition inclined towards neatness and order naturally, although of late I had become neglectful of appearances, and my heart ached as I recognised how terribly sordid mean surroundings influence the bent of the mind. How much trouble my mother must have gone through before she became acclimatised, as it were, to this wretched state of discomfort!

An immense quantity of torn, soiled music lay about, and on a side table near to a sewing machine, and some bright coloured scraps of silk, was a battered tray thick with dust, on which stood a loaf of bread, some forbidding-looking cheese and butter, and a tumbler with the remains of spirit and water in it, judging from the faint sickly odour which pervaded that corner of the room.

With a heavy heart pursuing my inves-

tigations, I came to a standstill at length before a photograph of a young man in a flannel cricketing suit, which stood on the top of the piano in a faded plush frame. At once I recognised myself. By the side of the photo was a pair of very high-heeled frayed crimson satin shoes.

“Evidently there is one sister, at least,” I murmured. “Well, she shall have a new pair of slippers before her next dance, at any rate.”

I had lifted one of the shoes, when a slight noise caused me to start and drop it. Recovering my equilibrium after picking it up, I heard a soft footstep pass along the landing, and then the door opened.

At once all power of moving seemed to forsake me, utterly helpless, unable even to turn my head, panting and gasping I stood waiting.

Nearer and nearer the footsteps came, but still I did not move. I waited, while my heart seemed almost to burst with longing and with love.

At last a hand was laid upon my arm, and a voice whispered softly in my ear—

“My son, you have come then at last ? ”

At the sound and touch I woke to life. With a smothered cry I turned to her, and blindly catching her in my arms, pressed her tight against my yearning heart.

For one minute I stood so ; hearing nothing, seeing nothing, knowing nothing, but that my mother's heart beat against mine, and that my loneliness had gone from me for ever !

But after a few seconds, during which I lifted my soul in thankfulness to heaven, I felt her quiver in my arms, and then gently loosening my grasp, I put my hands on her shoulders, and held her so that I could look into her face.

Oh, God ! Even now my heart quails at the recollection of that moment ! My blood seemed to freeze in my veins as with starting eyes I gazed on the countenance of my mother, the mother for whom

I had longed with such an intensity of wistful affection.

I knew the face. Even at that terrible instant I remembered where I had seen it before, and my soul sickened within me and my heart died in my breast.

With a groan I released her from my grasp, and then step by step I retreated from her until at last I was stopped by the wall.

She did not speak, she did not move, she only looked at me with her hard, glittering eyes.

“Merciful God!” I cried with an involuntary shudder, “it is she!”

And then, utterly unable to control my emotion under the shock of this sudden and awful discovery, I covered my eyes with my trembling hands, and broke into irrepressible moans and sobs of agonised disappointment.

There was the cruel, corpse-like face, and the coarse, blue-black hair, there were the bloodshot eyes and heavy brows, and there

were the livid purple lips and brutal jaw of the terrible woman I had seen in the Opera House in Paris.

And this, this was my mother! The tender, fragile, white-haired mother of my dreams, for whom my yearning heart had hungered!

CHAPTER XIV.

How long I stood there utterly stunned by the magnitude of my misfortune, and more miserable than words can tell, I know not. It may have been only a minute, it may have been half an hour, before my mother's voice recalled me to a sense of the absolute duty that lay upon me of endeavouring, at least, to make the best of my most distressing situation.

“Try to compose yourself, my son,” she said, in harsh, grating tones. “I can well understand that the sight of my face overwhelms you at the first moment with a sense of your own shortcomings. If one possesses a conscience it is difficult to

look upon those we have injured with composure."

I took my hands from my face, and gazed hopelessly at her.

She was clad in an embroidered silk dressing-gown, which had been once of some bright colour, but was now so disfigured by stains that it's original hue became quite a matter of conjecture. She was seated by this time in the one arm-chair the room contained, with her finely-formed white hands clasped in her lap, and her small feet, which were thrust into very trodden-down satin slippers similar to those which had arrested my attention before her entry, were crossed and stretched out in front of her, so as to show a considerable portion of a rather peculiarly symmetrical ankle, considering the large proportions and cumbrous build of her figure.

Altogether a less dignified aspect than my mother presented at that moment it would be impossible to imagine, and it cost me a hard struggle to overcome the repug-

nance she inspired in me sufficiently to keep my eyes upon her, as I repeated, in faltering tones :

“Those we have injured? Have I then injured you—mother?”

Ah, me, the effort it cost me to speak the word—the sacred word that I had rehearsed again and again with such tender rapture! Now it seemed to mock me so cruelly, oh, so cruelly and bitterly!

She gazed at me a moment with a calculating, almost furtive, look in her shadowless eyes.

“Do you then forget so absolutely and completely, my son?” she asked.

“Yes, absolutely and completely.”

“But did my face recall nothing to you?” she continued earnestly. “You appeared to recognise me at first, I thought.”

“I have seen you once before,” I murmured, “but only once, so far as I recollect.”

“And where was that?” she inquired eagerly.

“At the Grand Opera House in Paris, three years ago.”

“But I did not see you !” she cried.

“I suppose not,” I said, “or this meeting would have taken place earlier.”

“And so you looked at your mother and did not know her,” she went on, with a sinister smile of satisfaction upon her lips. “It is a sad story, and a strange one ; but on some accounts you may be thankful for your loss of memory, my son. The future is before you, and a bright one, I hope. The past is dark, in any case. Do not seek to drag it from the grave where it lies buried.”

There was an ominous ring in her voice that sent a chilly shiver through me.

“But this injury,” I faltered, advancing nearer to her ; “is it irreparable—cannot I make atonement now ?”

She leant her heavy chin upon her folded hands, and shook her head slowly.

“The wrong has been done,” she said, “and no atonement can undo the injury

of these five years of anxiety and poverty. I am no longer a young woman, and five years of hard buffeting with the world has aged me lamentably."

I looked round the wretched room, and my heart smote me with a dull sense of remorse for the fault of which I was still ignorant.

"What did I do?" I cried; "tell me that, at least. How am I responsible for this miserable state of things?"

"Ah, it seems so wretched to you, then, does it? I don't notice it much now. You ask me what you did. This much I will tell you. I was dependent on you; I and one other—your young brother Lucien. You deserted us, and left us to fight the world alone."

"But," I cried, in great distress; "why, why did I do this? There must have been some reason."

"You had your own reasons, doubtless," she continued coldly, "but you did not explain them to me; in fact you were never

a tender son. It is sufficient that you left us. Now ask me no more, I am willing that the past should be forgotten if you are. I wanted to see you once more, a mother's love is very enduring. I wished to tell you that I forgave you freely, and that not one angry thought remained in my heart towards you. I longed to kiss you, and to bless you once again. I thought in after life it might be a comfort to you to know that, notwithstanding your coldness, your mother never ceased to care for you."

I could not complain of the words, or of the tone exactly; but the manner was forced and unnatural, and there was no tenderness in the glance which rested on me.

She rose, and taking my cold hand in her burning fingers, pressed her lips to my cheek.

Heaven knows I tried to hide the aversion that I felt, but, as her livid icy lips touched my face, an uncontrollable shudder shook me from head to foot, and I shrank away from

her as if I had received a sting rather than a caress.

The next instant my white face flushed crimson. I knew she could not fail to have noticed the involuntary repugnance with which I had drawn away, and I was bitterly ashamed of the cruel insult I had offered her.

Pleadingly and deprecatingly I lifted my eyes to hers. For a moment she glared at me with positively wolfish fierceness, and then, shrugging her shoulders, she broke into a harsh, discordant laugh.

“Why, you are blushing; at thirty-one years of age you are shy, and of your mother, too,” she said. “Well, never mind; since you are so very sensitive, I shall not trouble you with many endearments, don’t be afraid. Come now, sit down and tell me of yourself, what you are doing, whether you are married, and all about it.”

This awoke in my breast a faint sensation of relief. Heaven be thanked I was not married; my burden was heavy enough to

bear as it was ; but it would have been doubly terrible if, by any chance, I had had to introduce, to such a girl as Charlie's love for instance, a mother like this.

I told her all she desired to know, and my heart ached more bitterly still as I perceived the covetous glitter in her eyes with which she received the news of my wealth. I was, therefore, greatly surprised when, at the end of my recital, she rose again, and said, with so cool an air of indifference that I was fairly staggered—

“ You are doing well in the world then, and you are happy ? So be it. I don't want to interfere with you. I thought possibly that as you grew older you might have become more kindly in your feelings towards me ; but you never cared for me, even as a boy ; and so it will be to the end, I suppose. Well, I don't complain, I have one child to love me, and I must content myself with that. Now, good-bye ; I shall not trouble you again, be sure of that.”

She held out her hand, but there was a

curious, anxious look in her eyes which belied her words and action.

“No,” I said, shaking my head sadly, “we cannot part like this. It is my misfortune that my heart is so hard and cold. I will not pretend an affection that I do not feel, but I wish to do right, and to earn your forgiveness for my cruel neglect. Mother, I cannot show you the tenderness you have a right to expect from me, but I will do all that lies in my power to make you forget the past, and to render your future a happy one.”

She turned on me eagerly, and seized my hand in an iron grasp.

“What do you mean?” she cried. “Let there be plain speaking between us at any rate, if there is to be no show of affection.”

“I mean,” I said, “that your days of poverty are over. I am a rich man, and if you will share my wealth you shall, to the uttermost farthing.”

She strove in vain to conceal the gleam of triumph which shone in her eyes, but her

white fingers clasped mine more tightly, and leaning towards me her hot breath fanned my cheeks, as she hissed through her teeth—

“Take care, take care, my son, what you promise, for I shall not let you go back from your word when once I have accepted it. Remember this, if you take me from my present calling now, I cannot return to it. I am a public singer; when you left me I was forced to make use of the musical talent I possessed. Five years ago my voice was not what it had been, and age and trouble have not improved it since. If I break my career now, I cannot take it up again, and though the calling is a poor one and not a very respectable one, perhaps, for I am not a high class concert singer, I have made bread and cheese and—brandy—by it.”

Again I shuddered, there was something so infinitely repulsive and suggestive about the way she spoke these last words, and it seemed as if she took a cruel delight in

shocking and wounding me, for she laughed once more as she perceived my distress.

“Don’t be afraid,” she said, “my means have not allowed of my indulging freely in any sort of extravagance ; but now tell me, are you willing to undertake the responsibility of my future and that of your brother, from whom I cannot be separated ? ”

I bowed my head ; I felt my duty an overwhelmingly hard one, but how could I shirk it ?

“Give me your hand then,” she said, “and swear to me that you will be faithful to your trust.”

“I swear it,” I murmured, and thus the strange compact was sealed between mother and son.

An hour later I rose to take my leave, having learnt all that my mother would tell me of my previous history. In the afternoon I was to return after having secured rooms for her at the Alexandra Hotel, then paying all arrears of debt that she might have, I was to convey her to her new home

until I had one of my own to which to welcome her.

It was my mother's own suggestion that I should take up my abode with her. At first I resisted, but ultimately I gave way; Charlie would marry soon, I knew, and then he would not want me; moreover, if she wished it, it had better be so; wherever I was, I could not hope to be anything but unhappy, but the consciousness of doing my duty towards her, as far as possible, might make life more endurable to me than it would be if I thwarted so reasonable a desire on her part.

I learnt from what my mother said that she was a Mexican by birth, but that my father, who died when I was an infant, was an Englishman, and personally much like me; the name of my father, however, she would not tell me.

"No," she said, "it is useless your asking me; I will not tell you that now, at any rate; possibly the time may come when I shall see fit to do so. For the present you

can remain Friend Perditus, and you can be supposed to be, as you really are, my son by a former marriage, and half brother to Lucien Guadella, who is five years younger than you are, and whose father died as yours did, when he was still a very young child."

No prayers on my part would move her from this, nor would she tell me from what source she had gained her knowledge of my name, place of abode, and present strange mental condition; therefore I had to content myself, as best I could, with the information that I was born before my mother attained her seventeenth year, and that I was now thirty-one years of age.

My youth had been passed, as I suspected, in India. I was educated in Calcutta, and on attaining the age of eighteen had entered one of the leading banks, and then, although I was in receipt of an excellent salary, and was almost the entire support of my mother and brother, I had suddenly, in some unaccountable freak,

left my post and shirked my responsibilities.

Of the five years that intervened between that time and the present, with regard to myself my mother could tell me nothing, nor would she satisfy me at all completely as to the manner in which she had contrived to keep herself and Lucien, who, it seemed, lost his engagement as junior clerk at the bank through my mysterious departure.

Baffled and dazed I bade her farewell for the present, and had reached the door when I heard a quick light step ascending the stairs. At once my mother laid her hand on my arm to detain me.

“It is your brother,” she said. “I am glad he is come.”

I looked eagerly towards the door, perhaps in my young brother I might still find an object upon whom to bestow the pent up affections that swelled in my heart; but when the door opened I knew that that hope also was a vain one, for in Lucien Guadella I recognised the mysterious evil-

looking young man I had encountered two evenings before, and who had questioned Harry Nesbit so closely concerning me.

Terribly ill at ease, for a minute we stood speechlessly gazing at each other, and then our mother interrupted the heavy silence.

“Friend,” she said sternly, “take your brother’s hand. It is right and just that you make the first advance towards him, for by your inconsiderate act five years ago you ruined his fair prospects in his native land.”

“Come, Lucien, my boy,” she continued, going to him and speaking so tenderly that I started with surprise. “Come, we agreed that by-gones should be by-gones. Your brother is disposed to act generously towards us now, and therefore our grievances against him must be forgotten.”

With an effort I stepped towards him and stretched out my hand; with some hesitation he placed his in it, but he did not seem able to meet my eyes, and his lips twitched under his small black moustache.

There was something cowardly and secretive in the whole aspect of the man, and, cruelly mortified as I was, my spirit seemed to rise against humbling myself before him.

“Brother,” I said, “I am told that you have suffered through my fault. Well, in the future I will pay the debt I owe you. I should be glad to be friends with one who is so closely connected with me, but I am afraid that you and I are not of the same way of thinking. It would have been more manly and open of you to have accosted me when we met the other night. Surely you might have gained the information you wanted from me instead of worming it out of my friend.”

He started and stole a furtive glance at me, lowering his eyes immediately afterwards.

“What do you mean?” he muttered, dropping my hand.

“That I overheard your conversation with Harry Nesbit in the train. I was in

the adjoining carriage. Why did you avoid me? And, mother, why did you conceal from me that it was through my brother you had discovered me?"

For an instant neither of them spoke, and Lucien's pale face grew paler still, but after a minute's pause our mother answered me—

"Friend," she said, in a defiant hard tone, "you have no right to question us or our actions. If your brother shrank from speaking to you it was natural under the circumstances. He knew nothing of your peculiar condition, and believed that you had behaved towards us with the utmost cruelty and selfishness. He was not even sure that I would receive you after all these years, and he did right not to accost you without my permission."

But though her voice rang out bravely she did not seem to be able to instill one spark of animation or courage into her son; shading his eyes, with a hand that I observed trembled strongly despite his efforts to keep it steady, he sat down at the table

with his back towards me, nor when I finally left the room did he turn his head in my direction.

My brain was in a horrible state of confusion, and I had reached the street door before I recollected that I had not impressed upon my mother the hour at which I should return to conduct her to the hotel.

Slowly and languidly I mounted the stairs once more, and was about to re-enter the room when my footsteps were arrested by a sort of sobbing cry from my mother.

“Oh Lucien, Lucien, my darling!” she cried, “don’t say that. You know nothing will ever come between my heart and you. It is for you that I have done this; that you might be rich and prosperous. As for him, you need not be afraid; he is a fine man, and one that a mother might well be proud of, but you know what my feelings always were towards him. Surely you must recollect what gall and wormwood it was to me to hear him praised by everyone while you were slighted. No, Lucien, you

have no cause for jealousy, my darling; I hate him now as I hated him five years ago."

With a deadly faintness upon me I turned away, and clinging to the handrail, stumbled down the steep stairs and gained the street and the outer air.

Charlie was at the window watching for my return, and before I had mounted the steps the door was opened, and I heard his cheery——

"Well, well, dear boy, how is it with you?"

I raised my head, but a strange confusing mist seemed to float before my eyes. Half blinded as I was, however, I saw the quick change in his anxious face.

"Great Heavens!" he cried, catching me by the arm. "What is it, Friend?"

With his help I staggered into the dining room, but my tongue was paralysed, I could not speak. One or two inarticulate efforts I made, and then with a desolate cry that rings in my ears still, I fell upon the floor at his feet.

CHAPTER XV.

My faint was not an obstinate one ; in fact I believe I only lost consciousness for a few minutes, but my first awakening sensations were those of such cruel mental distress that in my misery I flung my arms round the neck of my good friend, who, full of pity, knelt by the sofa on which he had placed me, and leaning my head on his shoulder, moaned out——

“ Oh, Charlie, Charlie, why recall me to life again ? It would have been better to let me die. Oh, my friend, on God’s earth there does not exist so miserable a man as I.”

He asked me no questions until he saw that I was calm enough to speak ; but he

sat down quietly by my side and took my hand in his.

Charlie denies it, but whether he is conscious of it or not—or, I should rather say, though he is unconscious of it, for Charlie is absolute truth in word and deed personified—I am certain that he must possess some mesmeric influence over me; and I have an impression that when he holds my hand, and looks into my eyes, he is at that moment absolute master over my thoughts and actions. Any way, I know that his power to sooth me even under the strongest excitement has never failed, and never did I recognise this particular influence more vividly than on this momentous afternoon.

In ten minutes I was able to give him a clear and succinct description of my visit to Hart Street, and my meeting with my mother. He sympathised with my disappointment heartily and sincerely, but I perceived that my mother's identity with the person we had seen at the opera was

not so startling a discovery to him as it had been to me, and it was a relief to me to find that our opinions were not entirely one on this subject. He remembered the lady, he said, very well, but he recollected also that at the time he thought my objection to her appearance was a slightly exaggerated one.

I did not attempt to argue against this. Heaven knows if he could have won me over to his way of thinking I should have been thankful.

“I am sorry, dear old boy,” he said at last, “that Mrs. Guadella turns out to be so different to what you hoped and expected, but many a man would alter the pattern of his mother a bit if he could. And my advice to you is, don’t fret and worry more than you can help; make the best of it. I believe your mother must have her good side. Well, then, let it be your business in life to find out that good side.”

“But, Charlie,” I faltered, “she hates me; I heard her say so.”

“As for that, Friend,” he said, rising, and pacing the room slowly, “I must tell you I don’t attach much importance to that observation. These southern races express themselves very strongly without always meaning what they say. I should imagine your mother was greatly incensed with you at the time you left India, and very likely, from her point of view, justly incensed, and that now she keeps up this show of anger to quiet the jealous fears of your brother, who must have detected some sign of affection in her towards you to have called for such a reply. I should forget I had heard that if I were you, Friend, I don’t believe that she feels any such sentiment where you are concerned.”

His object was to comfort me, and he succeeded to some extent. Things now did not look quite so hopeless as they had done half an hour before. I rose from the sofa, feeling somewhat weak and dizzy, but otherwise myself again.

“By-the-bye, Friend,” Charlie said suddenly, “how about the young lady?”

“There is no young lady,” I answered, remembering with a sigh the thoughts of the possible sister that the sight of the torn satin shoe had given rise to.

“Ah, then I suppose she must have been only an acquaintance,” continued Charlie. “I was almost hoping otherwise, for you seemed very much fetched, I fancied, at the Opera. Don’t you remember we came near to our first quarrel on the subject?”

With a start I grasped his meaning.

“Good Heavens!” I cried, “I never thought of her!” Charlie looked at me somewhat incredulously, and I continued hotly—

“I declare to you, Charles Hall, that the recognition of my mother so entirely overwhelmed me that there was room in my mind for no other thought. Surely you’ll believe me on my word.”

“Come, come, Friend,” he said gravely,

“this young girl is rather a red rag between you and me. Of course I believe you, my boy, and between ourselves I am not particularly sorry that the great impression that she made upon you at the time should have worn off to some extent. Julia and I are on the look out in your interests, Friend, and I assure you we are going to be very hard to please.”

I made no reply. I did not think it necessary to inform him that by recalling this young girl to my mind he had done me the greatest possible service, and that whereas ten minutes before the duty of returning to fetch my mother from her poor lodgings had been an almost insufferable one, now I actually longed for four o'clock to arrive, that I might question her on this most intensely interesting subject.

Three years had passed since I lost sight of the sweet childish face that sunny morning in early April. In that time how much I had altered, and she, why she would be

changed past recognition, between a girl of seventeen and a woman of twenty there is a wide difference.

Charlie did not say anything, but I noticed that he had to struggle hard to suppress a meaning smile, when I handed my plate for a second help at lunch, with the careless remark that after all my temporary attack did not seem to have affected my health to any extent.

I started out to fetch my mother in better spirits than I could have believed possible, but when I reached Hart Street things were in such a terrible state of confusion that my comparative ease of mind was banished at once.

My mother, dressed in a long trailing red silk gown, with her face thickly powdered, and her heavy black eyebrows rendered heavier and blacker still by some meretricious and unnatural means, looked almost more forbidding than she had done in the morning. She was also in a condition of such wild triumphant excitement that I own she terrified me.

Walking up and down the room, she laughed and gesticulated until my blood ran cold in my veins, while the poor scared little servant, with the traces of tears still wet upon her cheeks, ran ceaselessly to and fro, trying in vain to execute her incomprehensible orders.

For a time I remained looking quietly on, feeling thankful that my mother was too fully occupied to converse with me, or to notice my increased embarrassment at her appearance, but presently an incident occurred which roused me out of myself.

The little servant was carrying into the room a dressing-case, which must have been very heavy, for suddenly the strap broke, the box fell to the ground, and, the lock giving way, its contents—sham jewellery, and theatrical cosmetics and powders, rolled in every direction.

In a paroxysm of ungovernable fury, my mother rushed at the offending child, and, to my unspeakable dismay, clutching her tightly by each shoulder, first shook her so

violently that her head swayed backwards and forwards in a manner sickening to behold, and then finished by administering so hearty a box on the ears, that my own tingled in sympathy.

“You little careless wretch!” she shrieked.

But ere she could lift her heavy hand again, I had snatched the girl from her.

“Mother!” I cried, “what are you doing? For heaven’s sake——”

My mother retreated a step, and there was a lurid red gleam in her eyes as she glared at me. In a minute or so, however, she recovered her composure, and then with a shrug of the shoulders and rather a nervous laugh, she turned away, and began picking up her scattered treasures.

“I am sorry I shocked you, my son,” she said sneeringly; “we Mexicans have hot tempers, and when our bloods are up we don’t stop to think. Here, lend me half-a-crown, will you? I haven’t any change.”

As I handed her the coin I tried to soften the harshness of my judgment upon her.

“Poor thing,” I thought, “she may not have been like this always. Poverty and trouble have probably soured her and brought her worst traits into prominence. Well, if so, they reflect on me; for, for her poverty at least, I must hold myself responsible.”

These reflections were interrupted by my mother’s advancing towards the girl, who, wiping her streaming eyes with her apron, stood cowering and sobbing by my side.

“There,” said she, flinging the half-crown down upon the floor, “pick that up, you little fool, and leave off whimpering and howling. Come, I can’t waste any more time, help to get these things together. We have kept my son’s carriage waiting too long already.”

Charlie had lent me his brougham to do my mother honour, and this, as well as a cab for the luggage, stood at the door.

But the long-suffering patient little worm

turned at last. With sparkling eyes and crimson cheeks the small maid, in her impotent fury, actually spat upon the coin before she ground it under her heel, and then, raising her grimy hand, she pointed at my mother.

“I don’t want your money,” she cried; “I wouldn’t take it if I was starving. I hate you, you are no lady, you’re not; no, and you are no woman! You’ve got a stone instead of a heart. If that gentleman had lost you, it’s the worst day that ever happened to him when he found you again. I shall sing hallelujah when I see your back; but he’d better go and drown himself in the river yonder than take you home to live with him.”

With that she rushed out of the room, and no entreaties on my part would prevail on either her or the landlady of the house to give us any further assistance. The woman, in fact, who seemed to have a positive detestation of my mother, was inclined for once to do battle on her miserable

little slavey's account, and actually threatened a prosecution for assault. However, by means of a five pound note I managed to avert this misery, and then, after paying my mother's bills, I called in a man from the street, and between us we loaded the top of the cab.

I waited until my mother was seated in the brougham, and then, desiring the coachman to drive to the Alexandra Hotel, stepped in and took my place by her side. Immediately she lowered the window next to her, and, putting her head out, looked up and down the miserable street, with its dirty pavement and crowds of screaming children.

"Good-bye," she muttered, with a malevolent gleam in her eyes, shaking her clenched fist at the frightened little ones; "Good-bye for ever! If a bolt from Heaven could fall upon the place and destroy it utterly, and every man and woman and wretched child living in it, I should have my heart's desire."

She settled herself comfortably after this,

and then, looking into my dismayed countenance, once more she broke into a harsh, discordant laugh.

“ I have shocked you again, my son, have I ? Well, the sooner you get to understand me the better. I am not a humbug, at any rate.”

I had known my mother for two short hours only, but I already perceived this peculiarity in her. She prided herself upon her plainness of speaking, and, the meaner and more cruel the sentiment, apparently the greater satisfaction she had in expressing it. She had no reverence or respect for anything in creation, and for a man or woman to attempt to rise beyond the general level was sufficient to stigmatise them in her eyes as the most contemptible of hypocrites.

My mother gave a sigh of satisfaction as she glanced round the private sitting-room that I had secured for her in the Alexandra Hotel. The apartment overlooked the park, which was at that time thronged with

fashionable gaily-dressed people. The tea equipage was on the table, and in every respect, with its cheery outlook and comfortable furniture, the room offered a very delightful contrast to the one she had just left.

"Where is Lucien?" I inquired, as, having tossed her bonnet and mantle on to the sofa, she seated herself before the tea-tray.

"Gone to his tailor's," she replied. "Poor boy, he was awfully shabby; I couldn't bear to look at him, for he is a handsome fellow when he's well dressed. He's not your equal in that respect, Friend. He pays for dress, and I don't believe you do."

"Is that complimentary or the reverse?" I asked, forcing a smile.

"Why, complimentary, of course. But I warn you, you must not expect many such pleasant speeches from me. Lucien is the most jealous creature in existence, and I love him too well to hurt his feel-

ings. If he thought you would ever have an equal place in my heart I wouldn't answer for the consequences, therefore you must not always accept my manner as a true expression of my feelings where you are concerned."

At once I became aware that she knew I had overheard her acknowledgment of hatred for me. I wondered I had not thought of this before, as the noise I made in stumbling down the uncarpeted stairs, could not have failed to attract their attention.

I was not sure whether she spoke with sincerity, but I was rather inclined to believe that she did. Moreover, what she hinted now quite tallied with Charlie's view of the subject, and I could not help feeling somewhat comforted, for it had seemed so horrible to have the prospect of living under the same roof with one who had herself admitted that I was an object of hatred to her, specially when that one was my mother, towards whom, notwithstanding

the personal repulsion I felt for her, I intended to act so generously.

I imagine that the gloom of my countenance must have lifted to some extent, for my mother's tone grew more cheerful and confident as she proceeded :

"Friend, Lucien has not the wherewithal to pay his tailor, you know."

"That doesn't matter," I answered promptly, "I shall settle an income on him at once; we will have a chat about that to-morrow. What's his profession, mother?"

"He has no regular profession," she replied. "For the last five years he has tried to earn a living in bye ways connected with music. He was business manager for a touring music hall company with whom I sang for a couple of seasons."

I winced perceptibly, and again my mother's sardonic smile appeared upon her lips.

"He must give up that life at once," I said impetuously; "it is horrible to me

that either of you should ever have been connected with it. Lucien must find some more worthy style of occupation."

My mother rose from the tea-table, and, throwing herself into a luxurious easy chair, stretched her crossed feet out in front of her as she had done in the morning.

I soon discovered that this was her favourite attitude, and very much it disconcerted me often to see her lolling thus among a group of dignified matrons, who showed no more than the tips of their shoes, while my mother's ankles were freely exposed for admiration.

"I don't suppose," she began languidly, "that you will have any difficulty in persuading your brother to give up the music halls; he never cared about the life. In fact he is not fond of work, and I expect will want a bit of a holiday now."

"Very well, he is welcome to that," I said; "I am willing to work for everybody, for a time at least."

All this while I had waited for an opportunity of approaching the subject which had not been out of my thoughts for a minute since Charlie had suggested it to me, but again my mother interrupted me.

“Is there a *table d’hôte* here, Friend?” she inquired.

“I believe so,” I answered, “but I thought you would prefer dining in private, so I have ordered them to bring it here.”

“Ah, well, that will do for to-night; so long as you give me salmon and champagne I shall be satisfied. I’m a famous trencher-woman, I promise you; but, as a rule, I should like to dine downstairs; I am fond of a crowd of people; besides, I must set to work to make friends at once. By the beginning of next season we must be in society, you know. Sometimes you pick up very desirable acquaintances in hotels.”

“It is but natural,” I thought, struggling against the disapproval her eager calculating face inspired. “Would you

like to go down to-night, mother?" I said, "I can easily countermand the private dinner."

"Go down to-night? No thank you," she replied, "I must keep up here until I have something decent to appear in. This is my very best gown, Friend, and it has done good service on the stage as well as in private."

Hastily I pulled my cheque-book out of my pocket.

"I will write you a cheque at once," I said. "There, will that do?"

The cheque was for five hundred pounds, and I must own I expected my mother would have shown some signs of gratification at the amount, but her manner was very cool as she took it from me, though I noticed that her white fingers trembled slightly as she placed the slip of paper in her pocket-book.

"Yes, that will do for the present at any rate," she said. "I can give myself a good rig out with this. I shall not want furs or

jewellery until next winter, and then you will have to pull your purse strings a little wider, my son. Now, I don't let the grass grow under my feet; therefore, as I've had a cup of tea, I'll say good-bye to you. I must go and get a bonnet at once, and I want to find out the address of Mrs. Bernard Beere's dressmaker; her colours are a little dingy, according to my notion, but her style is good."

"By-the-bye," she went on, "I can't cash this cheque to-day, and I shall have to pay for the bonnet; have you got a few loose sovereigns?"

I turned out my pockets, and when she saw that nothing whatever remained, my mother's restless excitement seemed to quiet down for the time.

At once I seized the opportunity.

"Mother," I said, "there is a question I have been wanting to ask you for some time."

"Really, what is it? Though, if it will take long to answer, you had better put it

off for the present, I have a lot to do before dinner."

"Who is the young girl with whom I saw you at the opera in Paris?"

It was evident that I had contrived entirely to conceal the great interest I felt in this matter, for my mother's face showed no surprise at the question.

"Let me see. How long ago was it, and what sort of young girl was she? I have had a good many companions at the opera in my day."

"It was in April, three years ago," I said, "and the girl was fair and delicate looking."

"Oh, I know," she replied, "it must have been Ella Maclise, a protégée of mine."

"Who is she?"

"Well, she is a young girl who I considered had some claim upon me, and so long as I could afford to keep her I did."

"That was very good of you," I cried.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, I don't see that I am entitled to

any praise. 'The girl's father was kind to me at a time when I needed a friend," she continued meaningly.

I saw that she alluded to my past in some way, and eagerly I pursued the subject.

"Tell me," I said, "I want to know all about it."

"Well then, since you will not let me spare you, Friend, these are the facts. Mr. Maclise, Ella's father, was a friend of Mr. Guadella's, and on the death of my husband he acted the part of a true friend. When you were old enough he obtained for you your position in the bank, and five years later he was equally kind to your brother; but the period of which I think with the deepest gratitude is that which immediately followed your desertion of us. What we should have done then, if it had not been for Mr. Maclise, I do not know. You may imagine therefore, my son, that when a sudden and terrible misfortune befell our benefactor, who died suddenly on hearing of the loss of his entire fortune,

I felt that his orphan daughter, left friendless and completely destitute in a foreign country, had strong claims on me for protection and guidance."

"And on me," I cried, delighted to recognise that, despite her unattractive manner, my mother was not without womanly sympathy. "Mother, I will pay the debt you owe her father. Where is Ella MacLise now?"

"In the same situation that she entered three years ago. On the death of her father, nearly two years before that, I went to Paris and removed her from the expensive school where she was, for I could not possibly afford to keep her there, and for two years she lived with me, attending a convent school as a day scholar; then, for the reason I have given you, we were obliged to part."

"But now you can have her back again, mother, it will give me more pleasure than you can imagine to help you to carry out your benevolent intentions towards the young lady."

“Ah well, there’s plenty of time to think about that, Friend; though I admit for many reasons I should like to have the girl with me again; not that she was a particularly congenial companion, but,” she continued with a peculiar smile that I could not fathom at all, “there are reasons why I wish to strengthen the bond between us. Then again, a girl at one’s receptions makes them more generally popular, not that I think her particularly attractive, though Lucien admired her tremendously, and was awfully spoony on her.”

A pang shot through my heart at this, and at once I sternly resolved to stifle before it had gone any further the tender nature of my interest in this girl, who in all probability returned my young brother’s attachment.

I bade farewell to my mother, and then sauntering in the park I thought the matter over calmly and dispassionately. I had not been favourably impressed with my brother

Lucien, but after all I was not quite sure that I had judged him fairly. The circumstances under which we had met had been, to say the least, of a very embarrassing nature, and perhaps his avoidance of me, and the natural curiosity which had led him to question my friend concerning me, had not been so blameworthy as at first I had thought it.

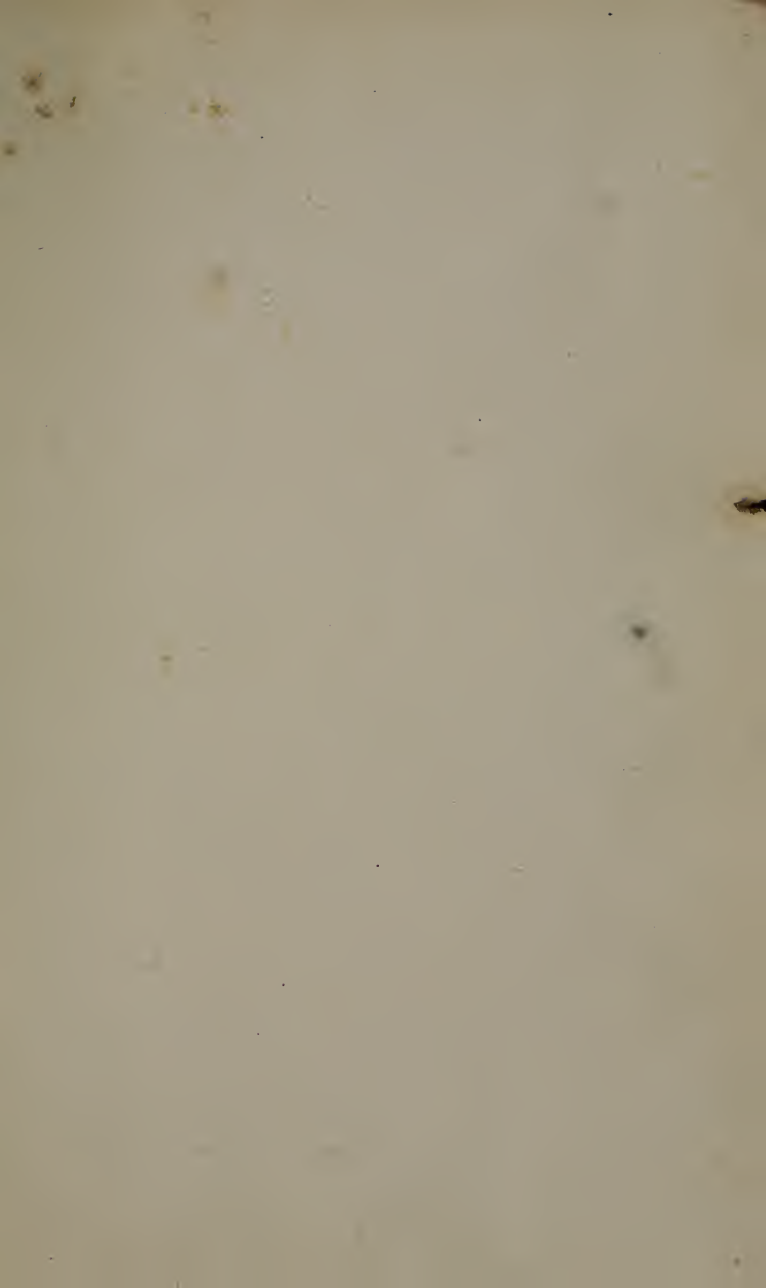
Any way I could not deny that to feel a genuine and disinterested attachment for this penniless dependant girl was greatly to my brother's credit, and I resolved that if I could do anything to further the happiness of either I would, even though I had to trample on my own heart in the execution of my duty.

END OF VOL. I.

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